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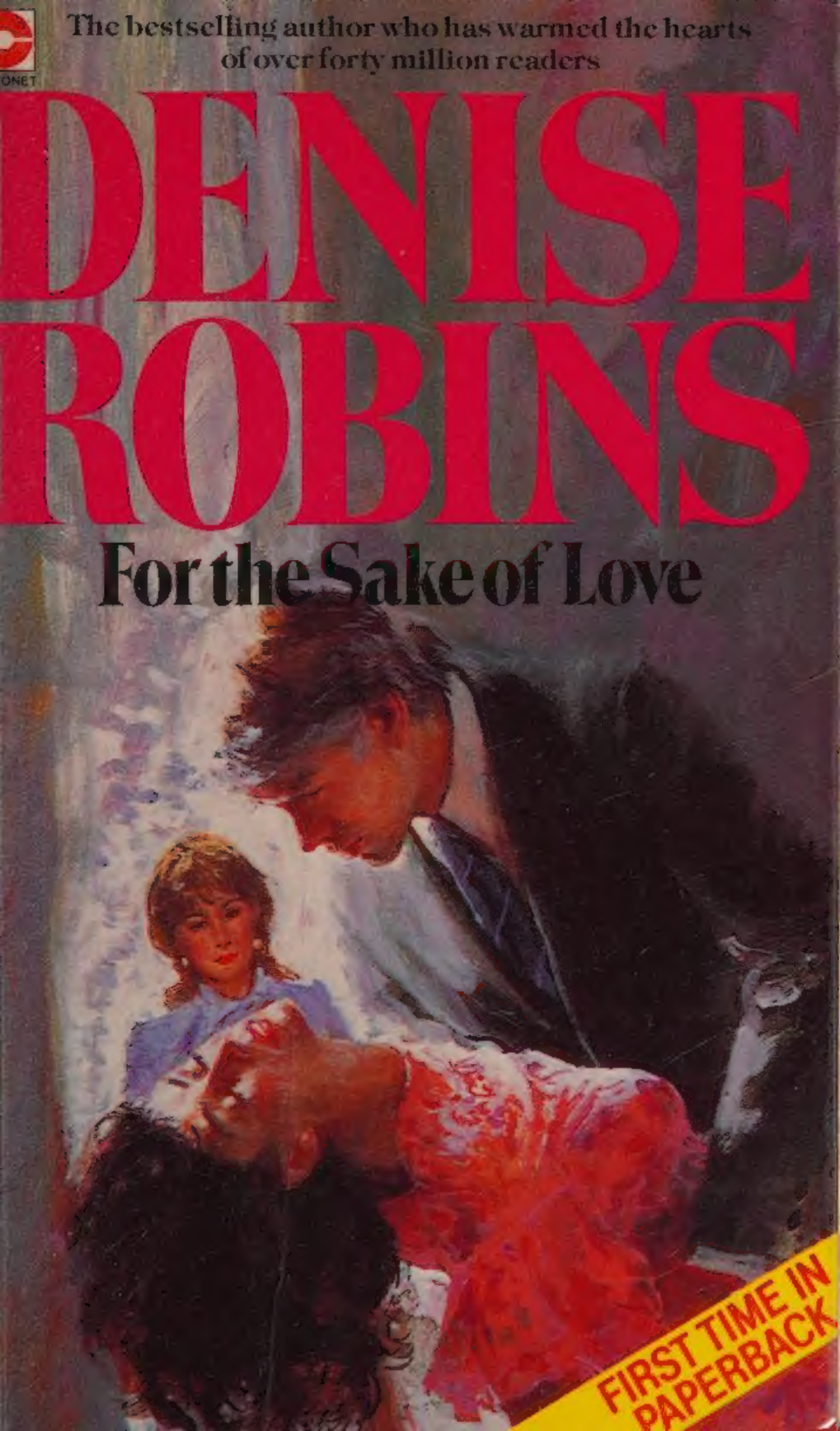
DENISE ROBINS

For the Sake of Love



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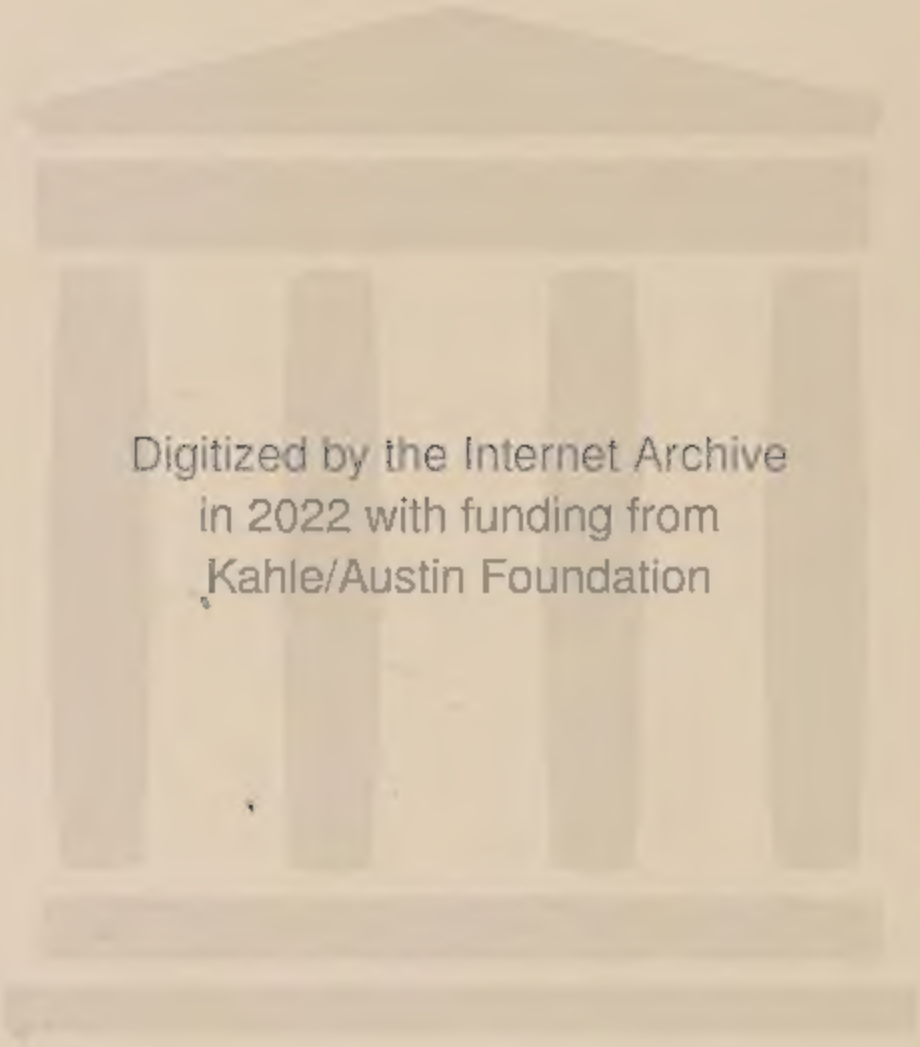
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'How much more?' Carol demanded hoarsely.

'Listen to me, Judy . . . you're suggesting terrible things. If I thought you and Maurice . . . if Maurice had been unfaithful . . . *was he*? Answer me, Judy. Is *that* true?'

The thing was beyond Judy now. Certainly she had not meant to go so far . . . but if it was necessary . . . to convince Carol. . . .

'Yes,' she said wildly. 'It's true. Maurice was my lover even more than he was yours. Now will you go on crying for him . . . wanting him back . . . will you?'

'My God, no . . . not if that was what he was like.'

'Yes, it is,' said Judy, and blurted out a wild story. Carol must remember, she said, that week-end just before Maurice went to China—a Saturday night when he had said he must go to London on business. Did Carol remember the date? Yes, Carol did. She admitted that. Well, it was on that night that Judy too, had gone up to London. Presumably to stay with a school-friend. Carol remembered that also. Those two incidents certainly synchronised. And on that night, Judy said, she and Maurice had stayed together—as lovers—for the first and last time.

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For the sake of love

Denise Robins

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Kathleen and Gerald
Beresford

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CHAPTER 1

THE doctor had just gone.

Four people—the four who loved Carol best in the world—sat in the drawing-room of Grey Chesters and discussed the verdict in lowered voices and with averted eyes.

Carol's mother, usually an arrogant and domineering woman, was, for once in her life, frightened and helpless.

'Dr. Turnbull says that our darling will go off her head—yes, that he will not be responsible for her sanity—unless something is done to rouse her. Something to stir her out of this dreadful state of melancholy!'

Colonel Riverson, Carol's father, equally frightened, but ashamed after the manner of men to show his feelings, said in a staccato voice:

'Well, God knows what we are going to do.'

Carol's twin brother—a manly edition of Carol, yet so like her with his delicate face, large blue eyes, and the fair hair with the unmanageable wave which had earned him the nickname of Kink—said nothing. He was a medical student, and had just come down from Barts for the Christmas holidays. He bowed to the superior knowledge of the specialist who had just left the house, and his blood ran cold at the memory of that verdict. It was unthinkable that his twin sister—laughing, lovely Carol, who had been so happy all this summer and so engrossed in Maurice Fairvill, her *fiancé* — should be in danger of losing her reason.

He walked up and down the room, and finally paused by the window-seat, where a slim, dark-haired girl of about twenty-three years of age was crouching. She was staring out of the window, watching the big white flakes of snow whirl through the winter twilight, blown like helpless moths against the window-pane.

'Judy,' said Kink Riverson, 'can you think of something —something that can be done to save Caro? You always had an inventive mind—when we were kids you used to think of ways and means in all our games. You were never at a loss.'

Judy Farrell, the cousin who had been brought up with Kink and Carol since she was a child of seven, turned and looked up at him. Her large dark eyes were luminous with tears in her small determined face.

'Kink dear, I'd do anything for Carol—you know it. But I'm at a loss now, all right. What *can* I do? It's so hopeless.'

Kink Riverson nodded, pulled a pipe out of his pocket and stuck it between his teeth, but did not even bother to light it. His mother, with a handerkchief to her lips, was saying in a moaning voice:

'Christmas Eve! Who would think it? You two children were born at Christmas-time. The first thing I heard was some children singing a carol—that's why I called my little girl by her name. Why—why should this ghastly thing have happened to her?'

Judy looked miserably at her aunt. There was no particular bond of sympathy between them. Mrs. Riverson had been none too pleased when, at the age of seven, Judy had come to make her home at Grey Chesters. She did not want another girl to share the honours in the home with her idolised Carol. But she had always done her duty by Judy, and Judy was grateful. Gratitude and affection were intrinsic qualities of her nature.

Besides, she had been happy here. The twins were darlings to her—especially Kink—and Uncle Charles, her mother's

brother, always had a corner for her in his heart even though at times he was afraid to show it before Auntie Vi.

To-day, more than usual, Judy had a burning desire to show her whole-hearted gratitude to this family. They had taken her in, educated her, given her a home when her parents had died—swept away by black-water fever out in West Africa, leaving her penniless and alone.

She told herself that no sacrifice would be too great if it could be the means of restoring Carol's balance and could make her feel that life were worth living again.

Judy recalled that awful day two months ago when they had received the shattering news from China which had wrecked Carol's happiness—indeed, wrecked happiness for them all.

Maurice, Carol's lover, had only just gone back to Hankow as assistant manager of the Far East Tea Company. Carol should have gone out to be married to Maurice early next spring. But there would be no marriage now. It was reported that Maurice had disappeared, and for some inexplicable reason shared the fate of several British missionaries in China. Then had come reports that he was being held for ransom. Impossible sums of money were demanded and torture threatened. Judy shivered even now at the recollection of the cables, the letters, the frantic appeals for help to the British Consul out there. What ghastly suspense! Maurice was alone in the world, so on Colonel Riverson had fallen the task of making all the enquiries and endeavours necessary on his behalf.

No wonder Carol had nearly gone mad—frantically in love with her attractive lover. Judy had felt it all very badly. She had cherished her own secret affection for the grey-eyed, intriguing young man who had had eyes only for Carol when he had met them here in Selsey last June.

After a sinister silence had come the report of his death. None of them had dared think where and in what manner he had died, but for Carol life seemed to have ended. She could not face the tragedy with a philosophical spirit. She raged

impotently against fate and allowed herself to go to pieces. For the last week she had stayed in her room, eating scarcely anything, wearing herself to a shadow with weeping.

Judy, adoring her, never dreamed of criticising her. Like the others in this home who knew and loved Carol, she was not really astonished by her excessive grief. This was the first blow Life had ever dealt the lovely, golden-haired girl to whom everybody was so generous, so kind. From her baby-hood Carol had been spoiled. And Judy, even in the school-room, had helped to spoil her, blind to everything but that appealing, gentle, wistful quality which made people want to do things for Carol. Carol had only to open those luminous blue eyes very wide and say, 'Oh, *do*, Judy!' and she did it, and felt amply rewarded by one of her sweet, brilliant smiles.

Why—why couldn't she help her to-day in her need?

Judy felt the atmosphere of the drawing-room unbearably depressing. She walked out, and Kink Riverson, equally depressed, followed her.

'It's a rotten business, Ju dear. . . . ' He came up to her, and she stood at the foot of the staircase, looking at him wretchedly. 'I don't see what we can do, and yet we can't let Caro go under—can we?'

'We can't—we mustn't. . . . ' Judy's voice was impassioned. 'Oh, it *would* happen to somebody like Caro . . . who's so easily hurt . . . such an idealist. She found just her ideal man in Maurice, and she feels that she can never replace him.'

'That's the trouble,' said Kink, knitting his brows. 'I wish to heaven she hadn't made such a little tin god of the man. We all liked old Maurice . . . but Carol has invested him with all kinds of qualities, now that he's gone.'

'Isn't that often the way?' said Judy sadly. 'Death casts a sort of halo round those we love. I was awfully fond of Maurice. He was a dear. But I suppose he was only human like the rest of us.'

'That's what poor little Caro won't admit now. She sits

upstairs weeping over the loss of a divinity. It isn't right, Judy.'

'No. It's wrong. But you know what Caro is. Before her engagement she used to talk about one man in the world for every one woman.'

'Lot of rot,' said Kink gruffly, and his fair face crimsoned slightly. He caught Judy's eye, and the flush deepened. 'I believe in love all right . . . but I never have thought it wise for anyone to put someone else on a pedestal. Caro's often told me she knew Maurice never looked at another woman. She's a marvellous little person herself, and she rather expects those she loves to be quite marvellous too. You know, Ju, I jolly well believe if she found out Maurice was only human, and as full of faults as the rest of us, it'd cure her of this ghastly melancholy.'

Judy stared at her cousin, her big brown eyes full of perplexity.

'That may be so, Kink . . . but, you see, she can't find that out now he's dead, can she? She just goes on idealising him, and it's driving her mad. Besides, I can't really believe that she'd feel any better about it even if one proved to her, for instance, that Maurice was a philanderer and that there were other women in his life.'

Kink bit hard at his lip.

'Who knows, Judy, my dear. Caro's a proud little thing. Rather intolerant, bless her, of any—well, shall we say irregularities?—in those she cares for. It was the sort of Sir Galahad atmosphere round Maurice that got her, you know. He certainly had no eyes for anyone but Caro, and there it is.'

Judy stared at the ground. She knew that Kink was right. Caro demanded perfection, and Maurice Fairvill seemed to have supplied it.

But was it possible that Carol would cease to grieve for her lover so inconsolably if she were made to see him as an ordinary human being, and not a god whose heroic qualities were deathless and indisputable?

She turned from Carol's twin and walked slowly up to her bedroom. He called after her huskily:

'Go and talk to Caro, Judy . . . think of something . . . don't let her slip from us, for God's sake. . . . '

Those words haunted her during the next hour when she shut herself in her own bedroom and walked restlessly up and down, seeking for inspiration that refused to come.

On the mantelpiece, amongst other photographs of friends and relations, stood one favourite framed snapshot—Carol and Maurice, arm in arm, on Selsey sands, taken by Judy just before Maurice went back to China.

Judy stopped in front of the snapshot and stared at Maurice's gay, handsome face. The very gaiety in the attractive eyes, gave her a pang. A splendid person, Maurice—tall, lithe, with a dominant tilt of the head and strength in the curve of the lips and squareness of the jaw. A fighter, Maurice, who would not brook interference or admit defeat. No wonder Carol had idealised him.

Yet when Judy thought of the things Kink had just said, she wondered afresh if it could be possible that Carol would forsake her lover, be cured of her grief, were those ideals shattered.

Judy, who had been fonder of Maurice than she would care to admit to anybody, knew that no disillusionment in him would have made *her* love him less. But her nature was so different from Carol's. She knew that, when she loved a man, that love could not easily be killed, and that she would forgive him—anything. But with Carol, love had its limits.

Judy walked up and down . . . thinking . . . brooding . . . working out the problem of Carol's tragedy. She paused again, this time in front of her wardrobe mirror; looked a little dubiously at the reflection of her small, slim figure in its tweed skirt and canary-coloured jumper. The large brown eyes which looked so intensely upon the world from beneath their thick, dark lashes, looked back at her from the mirror. She thought:

'Supposing Maurice *had* been a philandering sort of man,

and had flirted with you, and Carol was made to believe it.'

Her cheeks crimsoned, and she moved nervously away from the glass. But the idea remained and fascinated her. What if she went next door to her cousin and shattered a little of Carol's terrific faith in Maurice? Kink had said it might cure her . . . because she was proud and *exigeant*. Kink might be right.

It could be done delicately . . . just a few hints dropped that Maurice was not all that Carol thought him . . . and those hints might rouse her from that dreadful stupor of grief . . . and lift her from the shadows that threatened her reason.

It would be casting aspersions on the dead . . . sullying Maurice's character. But shouldn't the living be considered first? And Maurice would not mind . . . if he knew that his memory had been spoiled for the sake of restoring his darling's mental balance!

Judy, always inclined to exaggerate in her passionate, loving fashion, did not pause to wonder if she were doing right or wrong. She was just obsessed with the desire to save Carol at any cost. Carol might hate her—turn from her in horror—but she would bear that gladly . . . she felt that this was an occasion where complete self-sacrifice was justified.

Carol must be cured. So Carol must be made to believe that her lover was not the paragon of loyalty he had seemed. He had made love to another girl. *To her, Judy.*

Judy's heart leaped madly. She dared think and plan no further. She just walked recklessly, on the blind impulse of the moment, into Carol's bedroom and took the plunge.

Heart pounding, cheeks pale, big dark eyes glowing with zeal, Judy walked out of her bedroom into Carol's—ready to annihilate herself.

Carol was in bed. Her bedroom was more luxurious than Judy's—soft thick carpet, silky curtains of delphinium blue—Carol's favourite shade—a dim lamp burning on the table beside her.

Judy, approaching the bedside, thought compassionately how Carol had altered these last few weeks since the news of

Maurice's death. Her face looked transparent, colourless. Her large blue eyes had a fixed, hunted look. The life seemed to have gone out of her; even the wavy golden hair looked pale, devitalised.

She turned a brooding and melancholy gaze upon her cousin.

'What do you want, Ju?'

'Now for it,' thought Judy. 'I may be crazy, but I must try!'

CHAPTER 2

JUDY sat on the bed, heart still thumping, and nervously fingered a corner of the blue silk eiderdown which covered Carol.

'Caro, darling, I don't know what to say to you, but I've got a confession to make—something that you ought to know.'

Carol's delicately pencilled eyebrows drew together.

'Don't worry me, Judy. I want to be left alone.'

'But don't you see,' said Judy agitatedly, 'I *must* tell you this. I feel you oughtn't to lie here grieving for Maurice like this—that it isn't fair to you—because——'

She broke off, flushed and stammering. A look of interest dawned in Carol's eyes. She raised herself languidly on her elbow. She was tall—much taller than Judy—but she had grown so thin that her body looked as slight as a child's through the thin silk pyjamas and coatee which she was wearing.

'What do you mean, Judy? What ought I to know? What could stop me from grieving for my poor darling Maurice?'

'Look here, Caro, you've absolutely put him on a pedestal, haven't you?'

'I don't know what you mean by that,' said Carol coldly. 'I only think of Maurice as he was . . . a perfect lover . . . entirely devoted to me. You can't deny that.'

'Perhaps I can,' said Judy breathlessly, and her lashes fluttered and drooped. She could not look into her cousin's eyes. Carol said in an equally breathless voice:

'Are you out of your mind, Judy. What *do* you mean? Please explain yourself.'

'It's so hard to tell you. I . . . don't you see, Caro . . . I've watched you idealising Maurice, and felt guilty and beastly about it. But you mustn't go on imagining him so perfect. He wasn't . . . at all.'

'How dare you say that . . .and *why*?'

Judy swallowed hard. Her face burned.

'He was just a human person . . . weak as any ordinary man. He was attractive . . . he knew he attracted women, and he liked to . . . indulge in little affairs.'

'Indulge in little affairs?' Carol repeated the words as though she were choking. Her usually white face was scarlet to the roots of the blonde hair. She added: 'How *dare* you come here and try and blacken Maurice's character like this?'

Judy, floundering out of her depth, went on. She had to now. She must take the gamble, or sink.

'Because I feel it is my duty. You have no right to shut yourself away and take no further interest in life just because Maurice is dead. He wasn't worth it. He was engaged to you . . . yes . . . he loved you. But he was capable of loving another girl at the same time . . . me . . . ' Judy stammered wildly. 'Yes, he made love to *me*.'

An instant's silence. Judy dared to raise her head and look at her cousin. She saw a changed, an electrified Carol . . . a Carol no longer a languid, mourning, helpless creature . . . but a woman brimming with life, and terrible, dawning suspicion in her eyes.

'Do you dare repeat that, Judy?' she said.

'Yes. Maurice . . . made love to me.'

'Behind my back?'

'Yes.'

'When . . . where . . . '

'Q-quite a lot of times. . . . ' Judy lied desperately, and in feverish fashion enlarged on her story. One lie led to another. 'We met . . . at various places. He . . . I was in love with him . . . it amused him to make love to me.'

'It's a lie! I don't believe you!' said Carol furiously, and flung herself back on her pillows, shaking from head to foot.

'It's the truth!' exclaimed Judy. She pressed small cold hands to her breast. 'I swear it. Maurice was not the perfect man you thought. Really he wasn't.'

Half suspicious, half sceptical, Carol stared at her cousin. Judy was pretty enough, with her charming little figure and dark, bobbed head, and those great velvety eyes . . . but Maurice had loved her . . . *her* . . . Carol burned with indignation. She said through set teeth:

'Maurice was not like that. If he had been . . . I'd never have cared for him. I wouldn't let a man touch my hand . . . if he made love to another girl . . . behind my back.'

Judy swallowed hard. So Kink had been right on that score. Much as Judy loved Carol, she began to see the hard streak in her, the unforgiving quality. She was like her mother. Yes, Judy knew what Auntie Vi was . . . a narrow-minded prude. Carol had a streak of the prude in her. She would never understand or condone the weak, human side of a man . . . even though she loved him.

There was no drawing back for Judy now. She was playing a more desperate game than she knew . . . and she continued with it . . . desperately . . . and found herself sinking deeper into the mire than she had intended. Anything . . . to drive away Carol's scepticism . . . make her see that her idol had feet of clay.

'You must believe me, Caro. I tell you Maurice *did* make love to me . . . quite often . . . quite a lot.'

Carol sat up again, shivering, blue eyes almost black in her pale face.

'Maurice liked you . . . yes, he thought you quite pretty . . . but he wouldn't look at you . . . that way.'

'Oh, yes, he did. He found me attractive . . . he k-kissed me. . . .'

'Kissed you? As a cousin . . . a brother. . . .'

'No . . . as a lover. . . .'

Carol drew a shuddering breath. Her fingers clutched at the bed-clothes on either side of her.

'My God! If I really thought that true . . . thought I'd shared my lover . . . with *you* . . .'

'It is true. I swear it,' said Judy, burning-eyed.

'I could forgive one lapse, perhaps . . . one little kiss . . .'

'No, no . . . it was more . . . much more.' Judy floundered on, and did not stop now to wonder where her wild scheme was leading her . . . or what harm she was doing herself. She was buoyed up by the almost fanatical wish to cure Carol . . . and she saw success in sight.

'How much more?' Carol demanded hoarsely. 'Listen to me, Judy . . . you're suggesting terrible things. If I thought you and Maurice . . . if Maurice had been unfaithful . . . *was he*? Answer me, Judy. Is *that* true?'

The thing was beyond Judy now. Certainly she had not meant to go so far . . . but if it was necessary . . . to convince Carol. . . .

'Yes,' she said wildly. 'It's true. Maurice was my lover even more than he was yours. Now will you go on crying for him . . . wanting him back . . . will you?'

'My God, no . . . not if that was what he was like.'

'Yes, it is,' said Judy, and blurted out a wild story. Carol must remember, she said, that weekend just before Maurice went to China—a Saturday night when he had said he must go to London on business. Did Carol remember the date? Yes, Carol did. She admitted that. Well, it was on that night that Judy, too, had gone up to London. Presumably to stay with a school-friend. Carol remembered that also. Those two incidents certainly synchronised. And on that night, Judy said, she and Maurice had stayed together—as lovers—for the first and last time.

Carol, like one stupefied, listened to this astounding story.

The fair hair clung damply to her forehead. Judy was shaking all over. It was more unpleasant than she had anticipated to have to degrade herself like this. After all, it was such a dreadful thing—to confess to such a sin—to make herself out such a traitor to Carol and to everything that was best in her.

Carol said through clenched teeth:

'I don't believe it! It's *impossible*!'

'You've got to believe it,' said Judy. 'I—I'll take you to the hotel where we stayed and show you the name under which we registered.'

She told herself desperately that she could pick out any name in any hotel-book, so far as that was concerned.

Carol, looking at her with blazing eyes, said:

'But Maurice was engaged to *me*, and desperately in love with me. He never looked at you that way. Why should he want to spend a night with you?'

'I suppose I'm not unattractive,' said Judy, with a wild little laugh. 'And I was frightfully in love with him—yes, I admit it—I threw myself into his arms. He looked on you as rather a saint—perhaps he found it some relief to be able to take me away before going back to that lonely life in China.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Carol, with a long-drawn breath. 'How beastly—how beastly of you both!'

Judy thereupon humiliated and lashed herself—admitted her guilt, her shame—offered her crazy passion for Maurice as an excuse.

'If it's true,' said Carol, 'it's iniquitous. I thought you were fond of me, Judy, and I was absolutely *sure* of Maurice. You say you can prove it. Very well—then I've done with Maurice. I certainly wouldn't dream of lying here and grieving for a man who could do such a frightful thing. Even if you did throw yourself into his arms, he had no right to take you—when he was promised to me.' Her voice rose to a crescendo. Her slight body trembled with passionate anger. 'I won't demean myself by being jealous,' she added furiously. 'I'm glad I know, now. I wouldn't like to have married him—sharing him—taking him after *you*.'

Judy, breathless, scarlet, stared at the carpet, unable to bear the scorn in Carol's eyes. This was success with a vengeance. But, heavens! how dreadfully she, Judy, was implicated. And poor Maurice—was not all this rather unfair on him? She had sullied his memory and destroyed an illusion —an ideal. Well, wasn't it worth it if Carol meant to shake off the cloak of melancholia and rise up in her wrath, thereby recovering her reason?

Carol burst into further reproach against her cousin and her lover.

'I would never, never have believed it—but of course you wouldn't say such a terrible thing if it weren't true.'

Judy hung her head, speechless at that.

'To think that I've lain here torturing myself with the thought of *his* torture—wanting to die too—a man who could take you—my own cousin, who has been like a sister to me—away for a night. You don't know how I despise you!'

That was bitter to Judy, who loved Carol with all her heart. She said faintly:

'I s-suppose you c-couldn't forgive him.'

That had just the effect that Judy wanted. Carol sprang from her bed and stood facing her, slim, shaking with indignation, as flushed as she had been white, as vibrant as she had been listless.

'Forgive a man who could kiss me in one hour and go to your arms in the next? No! My God, no! Any more than I shall forgive you for your share in it.'

Judy also rose and locked her small hands together, feeling a little sick and frightened.

'Carol—I—what are you going to do?'

'Do? Nothing—just enjoy life. Yes, I shall be as gay as anybody I know, and have a marvellous time, and I shall never believe in any man again. As for Maurice—he deserved to be tortured by the Chinese!'

Judy was aghast. She had wanted this to happen, and yet now it seemed terrible. What in heaven's name had she done? She half expected that at any moment Maurice Fairvill's

ghost would enter this room and strike her dead for such calumny. And at the same time she was amazed that any girl who had loved Maurice, and been loved by him, could so easily swing from passion to hatred. Indisputably she knew that if ever she, Judy, had felt Maurice Fairvill's arms around her, and his lips on hers, and known that she possessed that gay, charming, attractive personality, she could never have stopped loving him. Even if she had discovered that he had found consolation in another woman's arms, she would not have deserted him. At least, not if he still wanted her. But Carol's love was of another kind. Never before had Judy been so aware of the hard and egotistical streak in her cousin. It rather staggered her.

Carol, her eyes glittering, marched to the wardrobe and pulled out a blue chiffon dress.

'I shall go down and dine, and put on the gramophone and dance with Kink; and you and Maurice's memory—everything—can go to blazes!'

'Oh, Carol,' protested Judy feebly.

Carol glared at her.

'Get out of my sight. I don't want to see you, Judy.'

She flung the chiffon dress over her head, then suddenly paused and looked at the photograph of Maurice which stood on the table close to a vase of pale pink carnations. Judy had bought her those carnations yesterday. Carol picked them out of the vase and flung them in the fireplace.

'Don't ever give me any more flowers, you rotten, treacherous little brute.'

Judy winced, but kept her lips tightly shut.

Maurice's photograph suffered next. Carol snatched it out of its frame and tore it in strips. Judy looked on, appalled. What havoc her story had wrought! Yet wasn't it just what she had wanted—gambled on? She must not complain; neither could she retract what she had said.

Poor Maurice! Judy, who had no such photograph of him, had always liked that one which Carol had once cherished. Maurice taken out East, with the familiar attractive smile

which screwed up his handsome grey eyes—brilliant, rather searching eyes they had been, under very straight firm brows.

'Get out of my sight!' Carol snarled at her again.

Judy felt very sick indeed. It was ghastly to think that Carol felt like this about her—spoke in such a voice to her—looked at her with such hatred. With the exultant spirit of self-sacrifice dying down a little, Judy was miserable—afraid of the consequences of this thing.

But whereas her agitation increased, Carol's seemed to diminish. Carol became hard as nails, even coldly venomous. It was difficult, Judy thought, to believe that under the surface of Carol's delicate loveliness and fragile charm there lay this vindictive and unforgiving quality.

'At least I have one thing to thank you for,' Carol told Judy in a tone of icy disgust. 'You've shown me that I have been wasting my time mourning for a departed *hero*. I shall go up to Town with Kink when the holidays are over and have a good time, and forget that Maurice ever existed.'

Judy's lips trembled. If Carol meant that, then she had indeed achieved her purpose. But at what a price! She put a hand to her throat.

'Carol,' she said shakily, 'I want to ask you something. Please don't tell anybody else—I mean, I couldn't bear Uncle Charles or Auntie Vi or Kink to know—about me!'

Carol, choosing a pair of silk stockings from her drawer and unrolling them, looked at her cousin with narrowed eyes.

'I've a good mind to tell them the truth. Why should I spare you? You haven't spared me!'

And Judy, scarlet to the roots of her hair, answered:

'I know—but let it be a secret between us. What good can it do to tell everybody? If you don't want to see me any more, I'll try and make Auntie Vi let me go away and earn my own living.'

'I've no interest in what you do,' said Carol, in her icy voice, 'and I only hope I shan't see too much of you till you go. I think Mummy and Dad would break their hearts if they knew how you'd repaid them for all their kindness to you.

And Kink would be appalled. For their sake I won't say anything.'

'Thank you,' said Judy, in a low voice.

Again Carol revealed herself as the complete egotist. She added:

'Besides, it isn't very pleasant for me to have everybody knowing that Maurice carried on with you behind my back. Thank God, I've got some pride! Now, please do get out of my room.'

Judy crept away, feeling so ashamed and so unhappy that she had no fight or argument left in her. She tried to tell herself that she was glad that Carol was dressing and going down to dinner for the first time in weeks—but the thing had reacted on her cruelly. Once in her own room, she took up the little snapshot of Maurice and the hot, passionate tears fell from her eyes and dripped on to his pictured face.

'I'm sorry, Maurice,' she whispered. 'I've done such an awful thing to you—but it *has* saved her. Maurice, if you're anywhere near and can hear me, try and understand!'

It was all so amazing. Why should Carol let her vanity, her pride, obliterate her love for her lover? Carol had been so pampered amd idolised since she was a lovely, golden-haired child, people were blind to her faults. Few would believe her capable of such hardness. Judy recalled the pitiless look in the blue eyes when Carol had said:

'He deserved to be tortured by the Chinese.'

Even Judy, who cared deeply for her cousin, and had sacrificed herself for her, was ashamed of her for that. Ashamed that she had no generosity in her make-up, no understanding of a man's weakness. Of course, it was rather an awful thing—to think that Maurice had stayed a night with her, Judy. The blood stung Judy's cheeks fiercely again. She swallowed hard. She was appalled by her own story.

A little while later she heard Kink's voice outside her door:

'Judy! Judy!'

Hastily she wiped her eyes and opened the door. Kink stood there with shining eyes.

'Judy, the Lord be praised. My dear, it's too marvellous —Caro's all right. She's just come down—can't you hear the gramophone? She's putting on a record, and she wants to dance. We're all dazed—never thought it possible. What on earth's made her change like this? What's performed the miracle? We've asked her, and she simply says she's decided not to go on wasting her time grieving. She's changed as though by magic.'

Judy shook her head dumbly. Rather black magic, she told herself wretchedly. She felt Kink's warm hands grasping hers.

'Hurry up and come down and dance, too, Judy. It's simply great about Carol—isn't it, darling?'

She looked up at his fervent young face. Her heart missed a beat. She became aware, not for the first time, that this boy's attitude toward her was undergoing a subtle transformation. To her he was still a brother. But, with a woman's sure instinct, she knew that his feelings nowadays were not altogether fraternal. She did not want him to feel like that. First cousins should never marry; besides which, she could never think of Kink *that* way. She made some excuse, disengaged her fingers from his, and shut the door between them.

She wondered what Kink would say if he heard that story which she had so wildly concocted for Carol's benefit.

'Certainly I shall have to go away from here now,' she told herself.

That night, at dinner in the charming oak-panelled dining-room, everybody was happy except Judy. Colonel and Mrs. Riverson were relieved beyond measure because their girl seemed herself again. Carol appeared to be quite normal—full of idle chatter, plans for the future. She was going back to Town with her brother, she said. She wanted him to arrange that little dinner he had once suggested so that she could meet Grant Maddison, who was a brilliant and well-known surgeon on the staff at Kink's hospital; a great personal friend of his.

'I'd rather like to see Kink's wonderful surgeon,' she stated.

Nobody seemed able to understand why she had changed in such lightning fashion and was taking such a keen interest in life again. But everybody accepted the fact gladly. And nobody noticed that Carol avoided Judy, and did not address a single word to her that evening.

Poor Judy, when that evening ended, felt more lonely than she had ever been in her life. It was a loneliness that she had brought on herself, but that made it none the less intolerable. She escaped from the family and went to bed early. Then, for the first time, Carol spoke to her—followed her out into the hall to do so. But what she had to say was not comforting.

'I've been thinking things over, and I've decided that I shall not demean myself by going to this hotel, where you stayed with Maurice, in order to see the register. You say you can give me proofs. Well, keep them. I've no further interest in Maurice's memory. So far as I'm concerned, he has died to me absolutely. But I do think you were a miserable little coward not to tell me before, so that I need not have spent so many hours thinking of him as *my* lover and breaking myself to pieces for him. I suppose he *did* care for me in a way. Obviously his feeling for you was just *physical*—but that's unpardonable.'

Judy felt sick. Maurice's feeling for her—just *physical*—how horrible! She stared dumbly at her cousin. Such a lovely, *soignée* figure in the blue chiffon dress; pale gold head gleaming in the electric light; delicate lips just touched, fashionably, with rouge. Hard to believe that lovely Carol could be so pitiless.

'I ought to be glad,' Judy told herself miserably. 'Her mind is quite balanced again. I ought to thank God—but I feel so ashamed I wish I could die to-night.'

'What I want you to do—' she heard Carol's cool voice—'is to make some excuse to Auntie Vi to find a job as soon as the Christmas holidays are over. Kink's very fond of you—

I don't want *that* to go any further. He'd despise you if he knew——'

Again Judy blushed to the roots of her hair.

'All right—I'll go away as soon as I can,' she said in a suffocated voice, and turned and fled upstairs because she was afraid she was going to burst into tears.

CHAPTER 3

ABOUT three weeks later Judy stood at her bedroom window and looked out over the garden of Grey Chesters at the rim of blue sea which was shining in the pale January sunlight. She loved that view of Selsey sands and the sea. And soon she would not be here to look upon it any more. This home, which had been her home for so long, would be hers no longer.

There was a lump in her throat and an ache in her heart as she turned away from the window and went on with her packing.

To-morrow she was going up to London to stay with Naomi Grayne. Naomi had been her greatest friend at the little boarding-school in Bexhill to which Judy had been sent during the years when Carol had been too delicate to leave home, and had needed all her mother's attention.

It was with Naomi that Judy was supposed to have stayed that fatal night when Maurice also had gone to London—the night which she and Maurice were supposed to have shared. And, in order to make her story ring true, lest Carol should ask Naomi to corroborate it, Judy had written in hot haste to her friend and confided in her. Naomi was absolutely to be trusted, and Judy had sworn her to secrecy.

So much had happened since Christmas Eve. Carol never looked back. She grew stronger physically, and lost all that

hysteria which had threatened her mind. When Kirk went back to his rooms in Town, Carol accompanied him, and from all accounts had taken a new lease of life. She was having a wonderful time with her twin and his friends, and seeing quite a lot of Grant Maddison.

For so much, Judy was thankful. Her wild scheme had succeeded beyond her dearest hopes.

But now she must pay the price. She was going to leave Grey Chesters and take a job. Uncle Charles disapproved of the idea, but her aunt was not displeased. It was quite time, in Mrs. Riverson's estimation, that Judy earned her living. Times were difficult, and they needed every penny they possessed for the twins. It was Mrs. Riverson's ambition that Carol should have beautiful clothes and amusement and put the memory of Maurice Fairvill entirely from her mind.

Of course, the family imagined Judy meant to come home for the holidays. But Judy knew that she would never come—that she could never face Carol again. She wondered what Kink would think about it when he saw no more of her. The last thing Judy packed was the snapshot of Maurice. A whim seized her to cut Carol's figure out of that photograph; keep just the half which contained Maurice. But she never looked at it without the sick feeling that were he alive he would want to come and kill her for what she had done; that he would never understand or forgive.

Judy was alone in the house with the servants. During the last fortnight, Colonel and Mrs. Riverson had been staying up in Leicestershire with some friends—hunting folk whom the Colonel had known since his youth. It had been terribly lonely these two weeks, and to-night Judy was singularly depressed.

The entire family was expected back this Friday afternoon, including Carol. Kink was motoring her down to Selsey in his two-seater for the weekend.

Judy hated having to face her cousin for even one more day, but Naomi Grayne could not have her until to-morrow and Judy had nowhere else to go.

Downstairs, amongst a pile of other letters, was one for Carol with a Chinese stamp on it. Judy knew the handwriting. It was from John Faraday, who had been Maurice's 'Chief' out in Hankow. He had written often since Maurice's tragedy, but Judy wished this letter had not come. She could imagine how Carol would receive it. She would probably burn it unread. Her bitterness about the whole affair was incredible.

She absolutely refused to condone the thing she believed Maurice had done; to treat his 'lapse' with any leniency.

Judy's uncle and aunt were the first to arrive back at Selsey. In order to keep up appearances, Judy met them and tried to be her usual bright and cheerful self.

Mrs. Riverson, taking off her coat, glanced at the letter with the Hankow post-mark and stamp and pursed her lips.

'I think it's rather a pity that Caro should see this. I want her to forget that awful business. She's made such wonderful strides lately. I hear from Kink that she is even blossoming in the admiration of his friend Mr. Grant Maddison. Nothing would please me better than if Grant Maddison won my girl on the rebound. He's a very brilliant man—and a very successful one.'

Judy had nothing to say. But she thought:

'Poor Maurice. "The King is dead—long live the King!" And, because Grant Maddison has more money and is in a better position than Maurice, Auntie Vi would rather Carol married him than that she had gone out to Maurice.'

That evening, Judy put on the one dinner-dress which she had not yet packed. She thought how plain she looked. The strain and depression of the last three weeks had made her cheeks thin. Her dark brown eyes seemed too big for the pale little face. Judy looked at this reflection a trifle bitterly.

'As if poor darling Maurice could ever have taken *you* away for a night!'

In some queer inexplicable way she felt intimately connected with Maurice now; so intimately that she could not get away from the thought of him. She had a queer presentiment

that somehow, somewhere, some day she would suffer more than she anticipated for the way in which she had restored Carol's sanity.

She went downstairs to the drawing-room. Her aunt and uncle were reading their evening papers. A log fire burned merrily in the big open fireplace. Grey Chesters was a charming Tudor house, and it all looked so peaceful and cosy in here; green and yellow chintz curtains shutting out the cold January night. But Judy felt intolerably depressed and alone.

The front door bell rang.

'That will be Caro and Kink,' said Mrs. Riverson.

She rose to her feet, a tall, commanding woman, once more self-satisfied and domineering now that she knew that her cherished girl was out of danger.

But it was not the twins who had come. Kink's little car had broken down on the road, and that made them late—so the family were to discover later on. It was a hired car which stopped outside the house. And, when the drawing-room door opened, a tall, rather thin man walked in alone, a man who wore a thick coat and muffler, and looked as though he were perished with cold.

The Colonel stared at him and let his monocle drop from his eye. Mrs. Riverson also stared, and her mouth and eyes grew round with astonishment. But Judy stood like one transfixed, and wondered if this was a hallucination—if she were going mad.

It was Maurice—Maurice or his ghost. Yes, indisputably Maurice, although the brown face was terribly thin and haggard and there was a livid, unfamiliar scar across one cheek, and the hair, which had been so dark, had turned almost grey. There was the look in Maurice Fairvill's eyes of a man who has seen hell. When he spoke, however, it was the charming, eager voice of the Maurice they had all known. Judy knew that here was a substantial man and no apparition.

'Hallo, everybody. God! but it's good to see you all again. Where's Carol?'

Judy put a hand to her head. It was throbbing painfully, and her heart beat so that it suffocated her.

'Hold up—don't be a fool—hold up,' she kept saying to herself. 'It will be all right—*it's got to be*!'

'Maurice! Good heavens, but we thought you were dead!' said Mrs. Riverson shrilly.

'Mercy on us, boy,' came from the Colonel, 'what's this?'

Judy said nothing. Only stood there with the back of her hand to her trembling lips and her legs feeling that they were going to give way at any moment.

'Hasn't Carol had my letter?' asked Maurice.

'No,' gasped Mrs. Riverson. 'Did you write?'

'I got Faraday to write just before I sailed, and to enclose a letter from me. I knew you all thought I'd pegged out, and I didn't want it to be too much of a shock to Caro. That's why I didn't cable. I got away from those devils about seven weeks ago, and came back on the first boat possible. I felt sure you knew I was coming. I can't begin to tell you what I've been through—that'll do later. But where's Caro?' He repeated the question impatiently.

Mrs. Riverson did not answer for a moment. In her heart of hearts that dominant lady was a little sorry that Maurice Fairvill had resurrected, as it were, from the dead. She had had very fervent hopes of a match between Grant Maddison, the big surgeon, and her darling girl.

The Colonel spoke.

'The twins will be back at any minute—we're waiting for them now—just motoring down from London.'

Another ring at the front door.

'There they are,' added the Colonel.

Then Maurice Fairvill caught sight of Judy, who stood in a corner of the room, as white as death, clutching a fold of a rose-coloured floral chiffon dress, with nervous fingers. His sunken eyes lit up, and a look of pleasure crossed his thin, tired face.

'Why, it's little cousin Judy,' he exclaimed. 'How ripping to see you again!'

He moved toward her impulsively, and, in the thrill of the moment, flung a brotherly arm around her and kissed her on the cheek.

Judy was paralysed. She felt the ground slipping away from her. Maurice's arms—both of them now—steadied her.'

'I say—don't faint, old thing. Is it such a shock as all that?'

And then Carol, followed by her twin brother, walked in. Caro, radiant and beautiful in a new brown fur coat which sparkled with raindrops; a blue beret at a rakish angle on her blonde head. Carol, rather pleased with life, because Grant Maddison was very fast filling the place in her affections which Maurice Fairvill had once occupied.

When she saw the man who had been her promised husband, the lover for whom she had grieved to such an extent that she had almost gone mad, she stood stock still—shocked—like everybody else had been—into a stunned silence. Kink, behind her, gave a shout:

'Good God! It's Maurice!'

Maurice Fairvill swung round, saw Carol, and let go of Judy, whom he had been steadying.

Speechlessly he leapt across the room to Carol's side and held out both arms. But she, with eyes like frozen blue lakes, and pretty mouth a thin hard line, made a gesture which repulsed him.

'Please go back to Judy—don't let *me* interrupt the passionate reunion,' she said, sneering.

Maurice Fairvill looked at her incredulously.

'Caro—my dearest——'

'Oh, no,' broke in Carol. 'Judy must be your dearest, surely—since you've been so much more intimate with *her* than with *me*.'

Dead silence followed these words. Judy, trying to rouse herself from faintness, wished that the earth would open and swallow her up. The rest of the family stared, bewildered. Then Maurice said in a low voice:

'I don't think I understand.'

'Ask Judy,' said Carol. 'She'll explain. You see, I know the truth, Maurice. It's tremendously surprising to see you again—we all thought you were dead. So far as I'm concerned, you'll remain dead to me. You belong to Judy. I'm sure she must be very glad to get you back.'

'Caro, I say——' began Kink, his fair face scarlet, and paused, at a loss for words.

Maurice swung round and faced Judy.

'What does Carol mean? What have you said to her? What have you to do with this, Judy? Tell me at once.'

Judy found it a physical impossibility to answer the question which Maurice shot at her in that cursory fashion. She was still trying to recover her equilibrium. Rather dazedly she saw that her aunt and uncle and Kink were all staring at her, waiting for her to speak. She looked desperately at Carol. But Carol only met those entreating brown eyes stonily and gave her no help.

Maurice drew nearer Judy.

'Judy, please explain. What's this all about? What the devil does Carol mean by saying that I belong to *you*—and all those other ridiculous things that she said?'

Judy knew, then, that she must pull herself together and deal with this situation properly and sensibly. She was given no time to think about it. She was conscious only of two overwhelming sensations: the first—of gladness that Maurice Fairvill had come back, as though from the grave; the second—of horror that she should ever have invented that dreadful story for Carol's sake. She might have known that it was dangerous to act so entirely on impulse. Her rashness was responsible for this ghastly *dénouement*. If only she had waited! Dear heaven, how she wished that now. Little doubt Carol would have been all right for a few weeks. Then, when Maurice came back to-night, all would have been well. His miraculous return, his warm, living presence, his arms and lips, would have cured her of her mental ills and brought new life to her.

'Of course,' Judy thought, swallowing hard, 'I've got to put things right. I must!'

'Judy!' said Mrs. Riverson's sharp voice. 'Maurice is asking you to explain. You owe an explanation—to all of us. I can't understand Caro at all.'

'No. What is the meaning of your extraordinary attitude, my dear?' put in the Colonel. He replaced the monocle in his eye and, very red and agitated, scrutinised his daughter.

'I think her brain must really have gone this time,' muttered Kink. 'Never heard such a thing—insulting Judy like that—refusing to look at Maurice. She's crazy.'

Then Judy, with two small hands pressed to her head, tried to account to Maurice for the thing she had done.

'Maurice—I—may I see you alone——?'

'Why alone?' he broke in angrily. 'No—really—it is too much.'

He turned back to Carol with a swift gesture of the hand.

'Carol, if Judy won't explain, perhaps you will.'

'No—wait!' said Judy in an agonised voice. But nobody heeded her.

Carol was answering her former lover in a cold, measured voice. The hard streak was uppermost now. She did not dream of sparing her cousin—or the man whom she believed to be unworthy of her regard. She was not even moved by the sight of him—Maurice, alive and here again in the drawing-room of Grey Chesters, just as he used to be in the old days. Her vanity was inordinate. So far as she knew, Maurice had betrayed her, behind her back, with Judy. She had no further use for him. She was, and always had been, a possessive creature. She must feel that she held every particle of a man's affections—every moment of his attention—before she could return his love.

This peculiarly exacting quality in Carol made it impossible for her to have any real comprehension of human nature, or any pity for weakness in others. While she had thought Maurice hers, and hers alone, she had been almost suicidal with grief for him. To-night she faced him without one single

thrill of pleasure of excitement; without one tremor or gladness that he lived and had come back again. She believed that he had done her an unpardonable wrong, and there was no mercy in her for him or for Judy, who had confessed her share of the guilt between them.

'You want an explanation—before my family? Very well. You can have it, Maurice. Perhaps you imagined your disgraceful secret was safe with Judy. But it wasn't—she told me. I know about you—and her.'

'Know what?' Maurice rapped out the question, his whole body tense, his penetrating gaze fixed on her.

'That you spent the night with her before you went abroad,' said Carol coldly and pitilessly.

'Wait——' moaned Judy. But still nobody heeded her. The attention of the others in that room was riveted upon Maurice and Carol. Maurice's face was livid now.

'*I—spent the night with Judy?* My God! it's a lie!' he said huskily.

Carol took off her blue beret and ran slim white fingers through her thick gold hair. She twisted her lips into a scornful little smile.

'Of course, you would deny it. Naturally. You acted a lie the whole time. You were engaged to me—you knew I believed in you—absolutely—believed in your love for me—and you said good-bye to me as though I was the only woman on earth who mattered. After having been Judy's lover—the beastliness of it! Yes, I don't care if my mother and father and Kink do hear—let them! They ought to know what a cad you are! Judy said you regarded me as a sort of saint and needed a little consolation. Well, as you found it in her arms, my dear Maurice, you can go back to them. *This* saint doesn't want semi-worship of that kind. It's all or nothing so far as *I* am concerned.'

Silence. The pretty drawing-room, rosy with leaping firelight and the soft amber glow from two standard lamps, was fraught with dramatic tension.

Colonel and Mrs. Riverson were too aghast at what they

heard to move or speak. Carol's twin brother, too, was stricken dumb. But, much as he loved her, he was hurt by the revelation of her hardness. Until now he had never seen this ruthless side of his twin, and it was a quality he did not share with her.

Maurice spoke again.

'Look here, Carol. I may be a little crazy—after the hell I've just come away from—but I suppose I do hear aright. You're accusing me of having *spent a night with Judy*. Is that so?'

'It is.'

'And on what grounds do you make such an incredible accusation?'

Carol nodded toward her cousin.

'Judy herself told me about it—confessed to it.'

Then everybody in the room turned and stared at Judy. She felt the hot blood sting her face and throat—a violent blush that she felt sure must be spreading right down her whole body. She caught at the back of a chair and clung to it.

Maurice's eyes, blazing with fury, seemed to scorch her up.

'Did you tell Carol that I spent a night with you?' he said.

'Yes,' she said in a desperate little voice. 'But I——'

'I don't think I'm wanted for anything more, am I?' broke in Carol's chilling voice. 'I'll go up and change for dinner.'

'Good God!' broke from the Colonel, and he sat down heavily on the sofa before the fire, pulled out a handkerchief, and mopped his brow.

Maurice, who had received Judy's answer with stupefaction, turned back to Carol.

'No—don't go—please,' he said, and walked up to her as she reached the doorway and took her arm. 'Carol, there's some frightful mistake. Look here——'

Gently but firmly she disengaged her arm.

'Don't do that, please.'

'You must listen to me. It isn't true—it's a dastardly lie—it's——'

'Please, Maurice,' she interrupted. 'Don't make things

worse by denying them. You'll make yourself out more of a cad than you already are if you let Judy down, as well as me.'

Maurice's temper, which he had well under control, strained at the leash. The veins stood out on his forehead like whipcords.

'Carol, I tell you it isn't true. God in heaven! what has possessed Judy to tell you such a foul thing?'

'It is foul, isn't it?' said Carol gently, her fair face like a mask. 'Judy confessed because she really did not see why I should waste my time grieving for a man so unworthy of my sorrow. Now if you'll excuse me——'

She turned her back and walked into the hall. Maurice followed. His hands were doubled, his thin, brown face was working. The jagged scar across his left cheek looked red and angry.

'Carol—for God's sake——'

'Please don't follow me and worry me,' she interrupted more violently. 'I don't want ever to see you or speak to you again. If I'd known you were alive, I would have returned your ring and the presents to you. But as I thought you had died in China, I told them and sent the money to Kink's hospital. It's all over between us, Maurice. I can't possibly forgive what you have done.'

He stared at her incredulously.

'God alone knows exactly what Judy has said, or why—but, whatever it is, do you mean that you *believe* I spent that night with her—that I *was* her lover—after all my love, my worship for you?'

Carol's lashes drooped. She scowled at the ground. He, watching her intently, remembered with a pang how often in the past he had kissed those silky lashes and told her how attractive they were—thick, golden, like her hair. He had adored her. This could not be his Carol—his gentle, sweet, responsive Carol—this hard young woman who had listened to, and believed in, such an incredible tale about him.

'You don't believe it, do you?' he repeated hoarsely.

Then she raised her lashes and looked at him.

'I'm afraid I do. Judy would not have confessed it if it hadn't been true. Why should she?'

'I don't know. I have yet to find out. But if that's all the faith you had in me——'

'I had too much,' she cut in. 'And if I'd known about you and Judy I wouldn't have made myself ill, worrying and grieving, when the news came through from Hankow about you.'

Maurice Fairvill stood still a moment, looking at her with a mixture of anger, perplexity, astonishment in his eyes. He felt suddenly very tired and sick and baffled by the whole proceeding. And a few hours ago, when he had landed in England, he had been thanking God for his good fortune. He had left the ship a fever-ridden, weary man, with nerves all gone to pieces after a singularly unnerving and terrible ordeal in the hands of Chinese 'reds'—unutterably thankful to be home again. He had come back with only one desire—to see Carol; to hold her in his arms, and forget the horrors of the past few months, with his head on her breast.

And this was his reception. He was rejected—accused of infidelity. With *Judy*. That was the amazing thing. With Carol's cousin, whom Maurice had liked—and with whom he had been friends. He had thought her a rather pretty, charming child—he had imagined she liked him, too, in a friendly way.

Why had Judy done this iniquitous thing to him?

Carol turned and walked quickly away from him up the carved yew staircase which was one of the nicest things in the old house. Maurice Fairvill stood below, staring after the slim figure in the blue tweed skirt and brown fur coat. When it vanished, he pressed both hands to his eyes and tried to think coherently. But no sane or analytical thought would come.

He only knew that Carol no longer loved or wanted him, and had broken their engagement, and that Judy was responsible—Judy, who had told Carol a monstrous lie.

With Judy, therefore, he must now deal.

He turned toward the drawing-room door. He shivered a

little. Fever, which had undermined his health all the time he had been in captivity in China, was on him now. But he did not notice the physical *malaise*. He was much too concerned with this frightful thing which had happened to him and Carol.

His astonishment, his anger against Judy, ran parallel with an acute sense of disappointment in Carol. It was very bitter to think that she should have such little faith—that her love had been too frail to stand the trial—that her vanity—her hurt pride—had conquered loyalty.

Inside the drawing-room, Mrs. Riverson was saying:

'This is a very terrible thing. Judy, when did you go away for a night with Maurice Fairvill, and how *could* you have done such a thing? The most shameful——'

'One moment, mater,' interrupted Kink. 'Let Judy explain. I'm sure it isn't true—that it can't be.'

Judy threw him a look of impassioned gratitude. It was so like dear old Kink to champion her and not condemn her unheard. She cupped her burning cheeks with her cold small hands.

'No—it isn't true.'

Kink came up to her and held out a hand.

'Judy dear—what does it mean? Tell me.'

'Oh, Kink, what have I done?' said Judy in an inaudible voice; then, avoiding his hand, rushed past him out of the room. She could not bear to be questioned, to have to suffer any cross-questioning from Auntie Vi, who was standing there like a stern, majestic figure, waiting to accuse, to condemn. Auntie Vi, at any rate, would be ready and willing to believe the worst of her.

She collided in the dimly lit hall with Maurice Fairvill. He caught her arm and held it.

'I want you, Judy,' he said in a rough voice. 'I want to hear what *you've* got to say about this incredible business.'

She could only nod dumbly, and look up at him with big, brown, frightened eyes which held the look of a trapped hare. Judy felt that she was in a snare; a snare of her own setting,

alas! She could not bear Maurice to speak to her in such a harsh voice and look at her with such fury. But she was ready to abase herself; to offer every apology on earth. She had done him a grievous wrong. There was no denying it.

'Well—out with it,' he said.

'C-come into the d-dining room,' she stammered.

CHAPTER 4

MAURICE dropped Judy's arm and followed her. So tightly had he held on to that slight arm that his fingers had pressed through the thin flowered chiffon sleeve into her flesh and bruised her. The small purple mark remained for many a day to remind her of his savage grip.

In the dining-room the table was laid for dinner. Two shaded candles—Mrs. Riverson did not like the modern fashion of candles without shades—had just been lit by the house-parlourmaid. The round lace mats on the polished surface, the good silver and glass, gleamed in the soft candle-light. An electric fire warmed the chill atmosphere of the January night. It was soothing and pleasant in here. But to Judy, facing an angry, demanding Maurice, the atmosphere was a stormy one.

She stood with her back to the door, which she closed behind them.

'Listen, Maurice—I want you to try and understand——' she began.

'First of all listen to me,' he interrupted. 'Did you or did you not tell Carol that we stayed the night together?'

'Yes.' Judy pressed the palms of her hands against the door behind her. She was trembling violently, and she could feel little drops of moisture breaking out on her forehead. If only Maurice would not look at her with such terrible eyes!

'*God*!' he said.

'I—it's all a frightful mistake,' she stammered wildly.

'It certainly is.' He laughed, and the laughter made her even more afraid. 'You and I—a night together—it would be a joke if it wasn't such a dastardly lie.'

She winced and licked her dry lips.

'Maurice—I did it—to save Carol.'

'To save her? What do you mean?'

'She nearly went out of her mind with grief when we heard about your disappearance—then your death. You can't imagine how badly she went to pieces—thinking of you being tortured and killed by the Chinese. And——'

'And I'm not sure it wouldn't have been better had they killed me and done with it,' he interrupted. 'It's worse than torture—to come back and find the girl I loved, and meant to marry, like a stranger to me—hating me—despising me.'

Judy breathed hard and fast.

'Maurice, don't, *please*!'

'Well, go on.'

'She did grieve—terribly—and the doctors said she might go out of her mind . . . ' Judy tried to continue her explanation, but the bitterness in Maurice's grey eyes appalled her. She had never seen a man so changed. Was it that period of horror in China, or this calamity at home, which had altered the boy with his gay, sunny personality into this violent bitter man?

'Well?'

'I couldn't bear Carol to go crazy—to be shut away in some mental home. I—wondered how I could save her. I thought of lots of ways. None of them any good. Then Kink happened to mention, in course of a conversation between us, that the one thing which would alter her feeling for you would be infidelity on your part. So I . . . told her . . . you *had* been unfaithful . . . with *me*!'

An instant's silence. Maurice did not take his gaze off Judy's face—such a pale, desperate little face now that all the hot, shamed colour had vanished. Then he said in a low, furious voice:

'Rather a difficult story for anybody to believe. But, even if it's true—if you made up this dastardly tale to save Carol from going crazy—it's unpardonable. You may, out of affection for your cousin, have wished to spare her from grieving over me, but there are limits—and you've passed them.'

Judy flinched visibly, but tried to hold her head high.

'I did it from the best motives—you *must* try and believe that, Maurice.'

'Can the best motives excuse such a base and lying tale? You have done me a terrible wrong—separated me from the person I love best in the world and destroyed something that can never come back. Even if I prove that your story was a lie, her previous absolute faith in me has been shattered. And if I *had* died, you would have destroyed all her memories of me. It was a monstrous thing to have done!'

Then Judy's dark, bobbed head sank low, and the colour burnt her cheeks and throat again. Hadn't she herself been troubled by the feeling that she had wronged Maurice—the dead Maurice—by what she had done? She had salved her conscience by the knowledge that she had restored Carol to a normal condition of mind and body. But now, with Maurice's words, Maurice's eyes lashing her, stripping her of her good impulses and intentions, she was piteously naked—nothing left but her guilt; her shame; her remorse.

'Maurice, I didn't know this was going to happen,' she said in a voice scarcely above a whisper. 'I'd have died rather than have destroyed Carol's faith in you had I dreamt you were coming home. But you were reported—dead.'

'Official reports have been inaccurate before now, and I happened to escape,' said Maurice Fairvill. 'As for not dreaming I would come back—no—little doubt you wouldn't have told Carol such a tale if you'd seen any possibility of that. But it makes it worse—when you did it knowing I couldn't defend myself.'

That hurt her cruelly. She had acted out of her loving-kindness for Carol and the whole family to whom she owed a

debt of gratitude. She had, in her blind, impulsive fashion, confessed to a sin which she had never committed, abnegated self utterly. It broke her heart to stand here and be so harshly condemned by Maurice. And she had loved Maurice—cherished something tantamount to hero-worship for him in her heart of hearts.

The tears sprang to her eyes and poured down her cheeks. She spoke in a voice torn with sobs:

'I—didn't do it—just because I knew—you couldn't defend yourself——'

'But you did—on your own admission,' he argued.

'You—must try and understand!'

'That balderdash about saving Carol's reason?'

'It's true—oh, Maurice—ask Auntie Vi—or Uncle Charles—or Kink!'

'It may be true that you thought Carol was grieving too much—that you wanted to help her. But you had no earthly right to make up that disgraceful story, and I shall never forgive you as long as I live!'

Judy stared at him blindly through her tears.

'What are you going to do?'

'What is there left for me to do?' he asked with a brief laugh. 'Carol believes what you told her. What *did* you tell her, by the way?'

Judy checked her weeping, and with her hands clasped convulsively over her breast, tried to acquaint him with the story just as she had invented it for Carol's benefit.

'I said—we—spent a night—at a hotel—that night you went up to town on business. You—did go to a hotel—didn't you? I—was supposed to be with my schoolfriend, Naomi—Mrs. Grayne. I told Carol we—that I went to you—instead.'

Maurice began to walk up and down the dining-room. He took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket; lit one; smoked fiercely, in silence, for a moment. The gong had been sounded for the evening meal. Nobody came in answer to it. The Riversons were all in the drawing-room—Carol had

joined her family—and they were too engrossed in a futile and fruitless discussion about the affair to think of dinner.

Judy began to feel very sick. Her head was spinning. She saw the gleaming cutlery and glass on the table as through a haze—and Maurice's dark, thin figure, still in overcoat and muffler, was blurred and indistinct. As from a distance she heard his curt voice:

'I see. So that's what you said. Well, I presume I *could* prove to Carol that I stayed in the hotel alone that night, but, if she's proud, so am I, damn it! I'm not going to offer her proofs. She's got to take my word for it—just as I'd take hers if the position was reversed. There can't be real love without faith.'

Judy, making an effort, said:

'Perhaps—she will—believe you. She—must.'

'And you've got to tell her the truth, too.'

'Yes, yes, I will!'

'Though, mark you,' added Maurice, pausing in front of Judy, 'things can never be quite the same again. All these weeks she's been feeding on that damnable story of yours—losing her respect, her affection for me. It will be difficult for her to get that back in a hurry. And I'm disappointed—bitterly—that she was so ready to accept your tale.'

Judy made no answer to that. Her eyes were closing. She felt herself slipping—slipping—and made a desperate attempt to clutch the door-handle and save herself from falling.

'Oh!' she moaned.

Maurice saw the small, slim figure in the rose-chiffon dress swaying drunkenly. He had no pity for Judy. He was much too shocked, too appalled by the thing she had done. But he put down his cigarette and hurried to steady her, with an arm about her shoulders. He remembered that this was the second time to-night he had had to hold Judy to prevent her from fainting. In the other room, Carol had come in—just in time to see her, Judy, in his arms. That must have added fuel to the fire under the circumstances, he thought bitterly.

'For lord's sake don't faint, Judy,' he said, with no sympathy in his voice.

But for a few seconds she seemed to sink into the shadows, and Maurice felt the full weight of her against him and had to put both arms about her to prevent her from falling.

She was soft and warm, and her dark, crisp hair drifting against his chin had the fresh fragrance of sweet hay in the sunshine. Unlike Carol, Judy did not use subtle perfumes. There was no subtlety about Judy. She was essentially frank and unaffected; younger and more naïve than the cousin who was of her own age. Maurice Fairvill realised that—and he also realised that there was plenty of charm in this girl—a charm which had not influenced him in any way before.

He was a weary, disappointed man, filled with bitterness and indignation at the wrong which had been done him; sick at heart because Carol's love had failed him. Through all those ghastly weeks in the hands of the Chinese he had remembered Carol, and wanted her as a man in a torrid desert yearns for cool wells from which he might quench his thirst and forget his pain.

He knew that, whatever came in the future; even if the misunderstanding was adjusted, Carol had injured, irreparably, that absolute confidence which he had had in her love, and she was the first woman he had ever really cared for.

But he was human enough to admit, even now, the aching necessity for a woman in a man's life, the terrible power her beauty, her personality, can wield over him, consciously or otherwise.

One part of Maurice hated the Judy who had rashly ruined his happiness out of a quixotic desire to do good. But the other was stirred suddenly by the soft fragrance of her in his arms. Carol was tall and slight, but Judy was little and deliciously curved, and for the first time he noticed the lovely arch of her dark brows, and the sweep of black, ridiculously long lashes spread fan-wise on the pale cheeks which were thinner than when he had seen her last.

Absorbed in Carol, he had scarcely noticed Judy in the old days at Grey Chesters. If he had given her any attention at all, it had been just to think of her as a nice child. He had been amused because she seemed a little shy with him. Yes, he had thought her unlike most modern girls.

Shy! Ye gods! He looked at Judy's mouth, which was half opened as though in piteous protect against life and the moment—a passionate, impulsive mouth, that belonged to another Judy whom he did not know: the Judy who had told Carol a dramatic story about the secret night which she had stolen with her lover.

Fury seized Maurice again. He shook the helpless young figure in his arms. He would not be moved by pity for her nor be made so fiercely aware of her alluring femininity.

'Pull yourself together—for God's sake, Judy.'

She opened her eyes and made the effort to come back from the darkness which had closed about her. Maurice placed her in a chair, poured out a glass of sherry—the first thing he saw on the sideboard—and held it to her lips. She drank a little, and the colour swept back to her cheeks. She sat very still then, shielding her eyes from the light and from Maurice's scrutiny, which she could not endure.

Maurice spoke to her.

'Well, I'd better go.'

Judy, with a sense of shock, stood up and faced him, a beseeching expression in her eyes.

'But you can't go—it's so late—you can't——'

'I can and must,' he said curtly. 'I felt so sure of my welcome. I dismissed the car that I got in Chichester, but I can soon ring up for one. I'll go to the Dolphin—and get back to London to-morrow.'

Judy's heart-beats hurt her.

'But you—must see Carol again. I'll tell her—make her understand——'

She turned blindly and ran from the room. Maurice made a gesture as though to stop her, then shrugged his shoulders, lit another cigarette, and walked into the hall to telephone. His

lips were a hard line. He became conscious that his head ached damnably. The fever was not helping him in this crisis. He felt almost too ill to care what Carol decided to do—what happened.

Judy, in her impulsive, fervent fashion, rushed into the drawing-room, determined at all costs to put things right between Maurice and her cousin.

Carol stood in front of the fire, quite cool and self-possessed. She had changed her tweeds for a black chiffon-velvet dinner-dress which suited her blonde beauty and made her skin look lily-white. She was facing her parents and her twin brother, answering their questions composedly, as though the situation left her unmoved.

Colonel Riverson, red, apoplectic, stuttered:

'It's impossible . . . must be a mistake . . . the child Judy can't have stayed with Maurice . . . not that sort . . . Maurice is a decent feller. . . . '

Mrs. Riverson, flushed and excited, said:

'I would *never* have believed it. . . . Judy and Maurice. . . . Good heavens, Caro darling . . . what a *dreadful* business! It was a dreadful shock to see Maurice walk into this room, alive, when we've all mourned him as dead . . . but it's much worse to know that Judy *and* Maurice have behaved so *disgracefully*!'

Kink, alone, had kinder things to say. Agitated and bewildered, the boy put in a word on Judy's behalf.

'There's obviously some misunderstanding. Wait—hear what Ju's got to say. Besides, Maurice denied it.'

Carol smiled disdainfully.

'Naturally he wouldn't be in a hurry to admit it—would he?'

'But he was in love with *you*,' protested her brother.

Carol looked at him with that new hardness in her beautiful eyes. It hurt him strangely.

'I am told a man can be in love with one woman and still find another amusing for an evening.'

'My *dear*!' exploded the Colonel.

'That's not like you, Caro,' said her twin.

She flushed, and kicked the toe of a black satin slipper against the fender.

'I've changed. What Judy told me three weeks ago changed me. You can't wonder if I'm a bit cynical.'

Then Judy came in, looking as white as a sheet, her great brown eyes burning as though they were mirrors of some inward fire.

'Carol,' she said breathlessly. 'Maurice is phoning for a car to take him away again. Carol—please, *please* don't let him go.'

Kink came up to her.

'No, of course he mustn't go. Judy—sit down—you look all in.'

She waved him aside, and had eyes only for Carol.

'Caro—don't let him go.'

'I'm sorry, Judy, but it can't matter to me whether he goes or stays. It would be less embarrassing for all of us if he did go, perhaps.'

'But, Caro—it isn't true about Maurice and me.'

Carol laughed—a cool little laugh.

'Don't be absurd, Judy. You can't make a serious allegation such as you did three weeks back, then deny it just because Maurice is alive and has come home.'

'But I can,' said Judy. 'I swear I only told you that—that unfortunate story because I—I thought you were grieving too much for Maurice.'

An instant's silence. Carol looked at her cousin through a golden veil of lashes. Then she shook her head.

'I don't believe you.'

Kink, putting his beloved pipe away in his pocket, stared at Judy eagerly.

'So that was it—you made up that story.'

'Yes,' she said in a choked voice, and stood there, changing from red to white and white to red again.

Her uncle pulled at the lobe of his ear, started to say something, then shook his head as though the thing were

beyond him. Mrs. Riverson, a trifle uncertain, waited for her daughter to speak.

Carol said:

'Don't be ridiculous Kink. How can you be so ready to swallow such an excuse? I am quite convinced Judy would not have *made up* that story. Besides, I saw her in Maurice's arms when I came in. My eyes are opened, and they're not going to be sealed up again just because Maurice is back.'

'But look here——' began Kink, and paused helplessly. It was beyond him, too. There was something in this thing which he could not grasp.

Judy stared at Carol in a stunned way. So she would not believe that the story had been concocted for her benefit. Oh, *God*, what was she, Judy, going to do? If only she could wipe it all out!'

'Caro,' she said. 'Caro, *darling*, you must believe me. It's hideously unfair on Maurice. You mustn't let him go away like this. He loves you—always has done——'

Maurice appeared at the door. His tired thin face twisted into a grimace. He ignored Judy and looked at Carol; at the blonde, shining head; the slight, graceful figure in the black velvet dress. He said:

'I think I can dispense with Judy as an intermediary and put things right in my own way. Carol—I want you to tell me, before I go, once and for all, if you believe what Judy has told you.'

She flung back her head.

'Yes, I do,' she said.

Maurice did not move a muscle. Only his eyes, rather terrible eyes in that moment, were alive in a mask-like face.

'I see,' at length he said.

'Added to which,' said Carol, in a high-pitched voice, 'I'm going to marry somebody else.'

The news came as a thunder-bolt to the family.

Maurice received it unflinchingly.

'I see,' he repeated quietly. 'In that case there is no more to be said. I wish you luck, and I'm glad for your sake that

Judy's story altered your outlook so entirely. Good-bye, Good-bye, Colonel. 'Bye, Mrs. Riverson. 'Night, Kink.'

He turned and walked out of the room.

Judy, with a finger to her quivering lips, stared after him.

'Oh, no,' she said in a moaning voice. 'Don't let him go.'

Carol stood still. And now there was a queer, doubting expression in her large blue eyes. She wondered if she was making a terrible mistake; if Maurice was innocent and Judy had really invented that story. On the other hand, she felt a considerable relief that he had gone; that there was no need for her to feel in any way pledged to him any longer.

She had been madly in love with him last summer. But Carol's passions were too egotistical, too closely allied with personal vanity, to stand the sort of test that Judy had meted out to her. There was no passion in her left for Maurice. She was absorbed now in that 'somebody else' whom she had just mentioned—a man who was equally absorbed in her. There was another point in *his* favour. He had so much more to give her, so far as this world's goods were concerned, than poor Maurice. She was excited by the prospect of a luxurious and entertaining life—as Grant Maddison's wife.

The family questioned her all at once.

'Who is this other man, Caro?' from Kink.

'Are you engaged to somebody else—somebody we don't *know*, darling?' anxiously from her mother.

Carol smiled.

'Kink knows him. It's Kink's friend.'

'Maddison!' exclaimed Kink.

'Yes. He asked me, when we danced at Malmaison last night, to marry him. I told him I'd think about it, and give him my answer on Monday. I intend to say "yes." '

Mrs. Riverson's eyes glowed. This was news indeed—it would be a much better match than the one with poor Maurice Fairvill, who was only a struggling assistant manager in a firm of tea-merchants.

The Colonel, not knowing whether he stood on his head or

his feet, sought refuge in a snapping reminder that dinner had been announced half an hour ago.

'The soup'll be stone cold. Let's go and eat, and discuss all this extraordinary business after.'

But Judy, whom everybody had forgotten, barred Carol's exit from the drawing-room. Panting, wild-eyed, she stood with her back to the door and faced her cousin.

'You can't mean it, Carol. Oh, please, *please* don't do this? It's all such a terrible mistake. You can't marry Dr. Maddison. You belong to Maurice. Maurice and I *didn't* stay together—I swear it.'

'Up in my bedroom, three weeks ago, you swore that he did,' said Carol coldly. 'You can't expect me to discredit your story now, just because Maurice is alive. So far as I'm concerned, the thing is finished. Please let me pass, Judy.'

Judy stood aside. She was conscious of a crushing sense of defeat. She was so appalled by the issue of the thing which she had done that she felt death itself would be welcome.

Maurice was alive, and now Carol wouldn't believe the truth and was going to marry another man. Carol was happy—but Maurice—what of Maurice's ruined happiness?

Kink lingered behind the others and spoke to Judy. He looked anxiously at her. There was such despair stamped on that small white face.

'Judy—my dear—what can I do? You know I'll believe you. I think I understand—I asked you to think of something that would save Caro. You thought of *that*. It was a pity, and yet——'

'Don't let Maurice go,' she broke in. 'Don't let Caro send him away like this.'

'I can't make Carol alter, Judy. She's made up her mind that you and Maurice——' Kink finished with a gesture of the hand.

'I can't *bear* it,' said Judy. 'It isn't *true* . . . '

'I'll talk to Maurice,' said Kink.

Judy followed him out of the room. Her heart thumped and hurt her. Maurice was standing in the hall, waiting for his

car to arrive. Carol had passed him without so much as a glance at him. Her mother had followed suit. The Colonel, less vindictive, after the manner of men, had paused and suggested Maurice should at least have some food before he left Grey Chesters.

'You've been through a bad time. You look seedy. It's a damned cold night . . . ' he had said, in his kindly blundering fashion.

But Maurice had thanked him and refused.

'So long as Mrs. Riverson and Carol think me all sorts of a blackguard, I'd as soon not stay, sir. I'll get something to eat in Chichester.'

Now Maurice faced Kink and Judy. For Judy he had nothing but anger in his heart. But he looked at the young medical student with softened eyes. He had been fond of Carol's twin.

'A cheerful return from the dead, Kink,' he said grimly.

'My dear old man,' said Kink, 'you must try and believe what Judy tells you. She made up this confounded story for Caro's sake. Caro was in such a hysterical condition—I can vouch for that—Turnbull, who came down from Barts to see her, said he wouldn't vouch for her sanity unless she was made to see reason.'

'So Judy achieved that by blackening my name and her own, and here is the result,' said Maurice harshly.

Judy, shivering, in tears, whispered:

'How could one know what was going to happen—how could one know?'

'As I have already said,' added Maurice, 'there are limits to what one should say or do—and you passed them.'

'Can't something be done about it?' said Kink.

'Nothing. Carol thinks that I was Judy's lover. She has turned completely against me; and she is going to marry this other fellow. Your mother also believes the worst—that's obvious.'

'She must be made to see the truth—so must Carol,' muttered Kink.

'It's too late,' said Maurice. 'The harm is done.'

Judy drew the back of her hand across her eyes. She had done that harm. It was a frightful thing; complete disaster. She stood before Maurice, looking at his weary, stern face with the hurt, bitter eyes, and felt that she would have given life itself could she by so doing have wiped out the injury she had done him. She cared more for him than anybody else. She knew it now, and she had dealt him the worst blow of his life. He hated her.

He must have been through sheer hell in China; she knew that he was quite alone in the world, and in the old days here, in Selsey, Grey Chesters had been like home to him. Now he had nothing; neither future wife nor home. Everything had been taken from him. And she, Judy, who had shrined him in her secret heart as a hero, was responsible.

She gave a bitter little cry.

'Maurice—I'm so terribly sorry—oh, Maurice—I didn't mean this to happen.'

Kink's heart was wrenched by that cry. He loved Judy, and he could not bear to see her so humiliated and abased. He walked away quickly, and joined the others in the dining-room.

Maurice said:

'I can hear my car coming along. Please don't wait.'

'Maurice—forgive me——' She whispered, agonised.

He looked at her almost sullenly.

'You've done an unforgivable thing.'

'You don't understand.'

'Perhaps not. The result is the same.'

'What can I do—to put it right?'

Sheer misery and bitterness suddenly made Maurice Fairvill violent and brutal, and Judy's very humility got him on the raw.

'Perhaps, my dear, as you've robbed me of the only woman I ever cared for by telling her I spent a night with you, you'd like to come and spend the night with me—console me—make it true.'

Judy stood speechless. The hot colour scorched her from head to foot. She was aghast. Then she said in a suffocated voice:

'If that could do any good . . . I'd . . . do it. But it can't. You . . . want Carol . . . not me.'

Still smarting, he said:

'But didn't you go to great lengths to prove to Carol that a man can love one woman and want another at the same time?'

'Oh!' she moaned softly. 'How cruel you are!'

'Well—are you coming with me?' he sneered at her. 'Or aren't you brave enough, now that I'm alive, to do what you said you did while I was presumed dead?'

She had no answer for that. It was too much. She just turned and fled from him up the stairs to her own bedroom. She locked herself in, lay down on her bed with her face buried on her arms, and was quite still and tearless for a long, long time.

She heard the sound of car-wheels on the gravel drive outside. Heard a horn blare—knew the car, containing Maurice, was turning the corner—heard it go down the Chichester road. Then everything was quiet again.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was cold and dark in Judy's room. But she did not switch on the light or stir from her position on her bed. She was insensible to the cold, to the fact that downstairs the evening meal was in progress. She could not face the family again tonight. That she did know—definitely.

Shamed to the very depths of her loyal and impulsive heart, Judy suffered as she had never suffered in her life before. She could not erase from her mind the memory of Maurice Fairvill's furious face and the insult of his bitter words.

'Perhaps . . . you'd like to come and spend the night with me!'

Of course he had not meant it. He did not—could not want her. He had only said that to punish her.

She wondered if she would ever be able to hold her head up again.

She had, in any case, intended to leave Grey Chesters tomorrow. She would earn her own living in future—and there was Naomi to whom she could go, thank heaven! Naomi would understand—believe in her.

It was awful to think that dear, kind Uncle Charles would think the worst. He would, inevitably, with Auntie Vi and Carol influencing him. Auntie Vi was her enemy. Judy sensed that. She would be only too ready to credit this shameful thing that her niece was supposed to have done.

Dear old Kink was the only loyal person in the house; the

only one upon whose faith and affection she could depend. But the less she saw of Kink in the future the better—for his sake.

It was Kink who came up and tried to make Judy leave her room and go down to her dinner.

'You must eat—you'll be ill—please, dear. Come down.'

Judy raised herself from the pillows, sat upright, and stared with aching eyes at the door. But she shook her head.

'No, I can't come down,' she said huskily.

'Then I'll tell May to bring you up a tray.'

'No, Kink—I'm not hungry.'

'But you've got to eat,' came his persistent voice. Then he added: 'Let me in—let me talk to you, Ju, old thing—just a moment.'

'What's the use?' she asked wearily.

'I must see you, dear.'

She sighed, crossed to her door, and unlocked it.

'Don't put on the light. My eyes hurt,' she said as Kink's slightly built figure appeared, thrown into relief by the hall light behind him.

His hands came out and grasped hers.

'Darling, you're frozen. Judy, why have you shut yourself away like this?'

She was grateful for those warm and friendly fingers, but afraid of that vibrant note in her cousin's voice. She had been afraid of it for such a long time now. Kink . . . and herself—no, it would never do.

'You know what's happened,' she whispered, with tears in her eyes. 'Carol's broken Maurice's heart, and I'm responsible. Carol and Auntie Vi—and probably Uncle Charles, too—think I'm rotten—a little beast—who would steal another girl's lover.'

Kink's fingers pressed hers more tightly.

'Darling, I know you wouldn't. You've always been too much of a sport—too straight for that.'

'But *they* think it,' she sobbed under her breath. 'Oh, Kink—it's such a mistake.'

'You invented that story to save Caro, didn't you?'

'Yes.'

'I know. I see it all. I more or less suggested it to you. Poor, brave little Judy.'

'I was wrong—I did wrong—I know that now. How Maurice must loathe me!'

'What does Maurice matter?'

Silence. Judy checked her sobs. Maurice mattered a lot too much—but she could not tell Kink that. The next moment she was in Kink's arms.

'Judy, let me comfort you—love you—take care of you always.'

She could feel his heart thumping against hers. His warm lips touched her hair. Passion was unrestrained now. The friendly cousin and brother had gone. In his place was a man in love with her. Carol's twin—telling her that he wanted to love and take care of her.

Sick at heart, Judy drew away from Kink's embrace.

'Don't, Kink dear—please.'

'I love you, Ju.'

'But you can't –that way. You mustn't. We're first cousins. It won't do—you know it——'

'Lots of first cousins do marry, darling.'

'But they oughtn't to. Besides—Kink—dear old boy—I don't care—that way.'

'Ah,' he said, with a rough edge to his voice. 'Then that settles it, I suppose.'

He stood apart from her. She could only just discern his pale young face in the darkness, a face as fair, as attractive as Carol's. She could think of him as her brother. As her lover—never. If she loved anybody *that way*, it was a man with a thin, scarred, bitter face and thick, dark hair which had grown grey although he was barely twenty-seven.

The tears dried on Judy's lashes and despair settled in her heart at that brief, poignant memory of Maurice.

Kink said:

'Sorry, old thing—forgive me.'

'Oh, Kink dear, what is there to forgive? I'm so fond of you. Let's stay good friends.'

'Yes, of course, always.'

'And you will always remember that I—did what I did—for Caro's sake?'

'Always, yes.'

'That'll help me a lot—to know you understood that,' she whispered.

'The family must be made to see it, too.'

'But they don't, do they?'

'That mater's a bit *difficile*. That's Caro's fault. She's so amazingly hard about it. I'm a bit sick with Caro over this business. She hasn't shown up too well. It's her infernal pride. But she ought to take your word for it.'

'It's all my fault—you mustn't blame her.'

'You're generous, Judy, as usual, dear.'

'But it *is* my fault—the whole terrible thing,' she said desolately.

'It may be—but you acted for the best—I gave you the idea by what I said that evening. I shall be furious if they treat you shabbily over it, Judy. Father's not so hard. He's just upset, and doesn't know what to believe at the moment. It's all rather baffling for him, poor old chap.'

'I've done a dreadful thing,' said Judy, with a sigh that wrenched Kink's heart.

He put out a hand and stroked her hair.

'Ju, darling, don't blame yourself too bitterly. After all, you did pull Caro together. You are responsible for her recovery. And she appears jolly pleased with life—and my friend, Maddison.'

'But poor Maurice has nothing.'

'No—it's damned hard on Maurice, I admit.'

'Please go down to the others now,' said Judy, turning from him. 'I don't want to be the cause of any more trouble. First thing in the morning I'm going up to Town—to my friend Nome—Naomi Grayne. She's going to help me get a job. Her husband has a good position—he'll help me, too. I

shall never come back here.'

'Oh, Judy!' Kink's voice was rough again. 'I can't stand that. Why, we've all grown up together—you and Caro and I. We can't break up the family—like this.'

'Got to, Kink . . . ' She tried to keep herself from crying again. Her lips grimaced into a smile through the darkness. 'I can't come back. How can I—knowing what the family believe?'

Before the boy could answer, there came the rustle of silk in the passage. A tall, commanding figure, wearing black lace and velvet Bridge-coat, appeared on the scene.

Mrs. Riverson swept into her niece's bedroom and switched on the light ruthlessly. Her suspicious gaze swept from her son to Judy who shrank from the bright illumination and covered her face with her hands, conscious of her puffed, reddened eyelids.

'Why this darkness?' said Mrs. Riverson in her sharp, clear voice. 'Kink, please go down, my dear. Coffee is waiting. I wish to talk to Judy.' And she thought: 'It's certainly high time Judy left this house. The boy's too interested in her.'

Kink frowned and moved toward the door.

'Judy hasn't had anything to eat, mater.'

'I'll see to that.'

'And look here, mater—you mustn't be so ready to believe the worst. It's a bit thick——'

'I'll form my own opinions, my dear boy,' his mother interrupted again. 'Please leave Judy to me.'

Kink gave Judy a swift look, then, with a gesture of impotence, left the two women. He knew his mother. She was a determined woman, and it was futile to argue with her.

Violet Riverson closed the door after Kink and stood an instant looking at her young niece through narrowed eyes. She felt that she had come up just in time to avert a fresh disaster. She was not blind to the fact that Kink was allowing sex to alter his feelings for Judy. Nothing would induce her, or Charles, to sanction matrimony between those two—even if they wished it. And, even had Judy not been a cousin, Mrs.

Riverson would have done everything possible to nip the affair in the bud. She did not intend that her good-looking, attractive son, still a medical student, should throw himself away on a girl like Judy, who was only a dependant.

Mrs. Riverson was a good wife; a devoted mother. She adored the twins. But from the hour when her husband had first brought Judy home to Grey Chesters—Judy, aged seven, a lanky, sallow, quaint little thing with enormous brown eyes —Mrs. Riverson had been jealous of her. Jealous of the time and money that had to be spent on her. Charles considered it his duty to give a home to his sister's child, once she was orphaned, and Violet Riverson had been forced to accept Judy. But the feeling of resentment had never really died, and although Judy's easy, amiable disposition had made it hard for the elder woman to pick quarrels with her, she had never really liked her.

To-night, the jealousy and resentment of the years culminated into a desire to hurt Judy and banish her from this home.

'Judy,' she said sharply, 'I want to make it quite clear that when you go away, to-morrow morning, to your schoolfriend, you go for good.'

Judy uncovered her face. She looked at her aunt stonily.

'I had already made up my mind to that, Aunt Violet.'

'You realise, I suppose, what a shameful thing you have done?'

'You mean that you believe I—I stayed with Maurice?'

'You, yourself, confessed it to my poor girl. It's incredible that you could have so lowered yourself, after your upbringing in this house—let alone how you could have been so ungrateful as to betray Carol, who has been so sweet, so kind to you.'

Judy drew in her breath. Her small cold hands doubled at her sides.

'I suppose you can't see I invented it all—in order to try and save Carol?'

Mrs. Riverson clicked her tongue against her teeth. She looked flushed and angry.

'Don't talk nonsense, Judy. You can't swing like that from one story to another.'

'Maurice, himself, denied it.'

'Maurice—naturally—would not be ready to admit that he behaved like a cad.'

Judy stared blindly at her aunt. She saw for the hundredth time, to-night, into what a morass that story had led her. There was no getting out of it. She was in a hopeless position.

'Thank God my darling girl has found a good, decent man like Dr. Maddison,' added Mrs. Riverson. 'I will admit your confession helped her to get well again—she was too proud to waste her time grieving over a man like Maurice Fairvill. Your uncle and I will always thank you for so much. Other than that, we can feel nothing for you but shame. We are *appalled* at what you have done.'

Judy gave up the uneven contest.

'In that case, Aunt Violet, nothing more need be said. I packed this afternoon—I'm ready to go. I intended to go away, anyhow. You need none of you see me again.'

Mrs. Riverson tossed her head righteously.

'You have brought it on yourself, Judy. Nobody can say you did not have the best of chances in this house—the same chances my own children have had.'

'Yes,' said Judy quietly.

'Your uncle is stunned,' added Mrs. Riverson.

Judy's lips quivered. She was fond of the Colonel. She said in the same quiet voice:

'I hope one day Uncle Charles will realise I am not as bad as you think—that it's all a mistake.'

Mrs. Riverson tapped her foot impatiently on the floor.

'It's so childish of you, Judy, to admit having done the thing one moment, and deny it the next, when you find that it's no longer a secret.'

'Oh, well,' said Judy hopelessly. 'There's no more to be said. Do leave me alone.'

Mrs. Riverson's cheeks coloured.

'You are impertinent.'

'I'm sorry. . . . ' Judy felt tired to death of the futile discussion—of the whole disastrous affair.

'I have one more thing to say. Your uncle, in the kindness of his heart, wishes to make quite sure you are all right, financially, since you are his flesh and blood. He will give you a cheque before you go, and he wishes you to know that he will continue to support you until you have found a job. He is much too upset to see you to-night. He will do so in the morning.'

Judy shook her head. The tears came perilously near to the surface again.

'It's terribly kind of Uncle Charles. But I—shan't take his money. I'd rather not—not touch a penny—so long as he—and all of you—think me such a rotter.'

Mrs. Riverson raised her brows.

'You can repeat that to your uncle. I have nothing more to say. Good-bye, Judy.'

For an instant Judy was tempted to hold out a hand, to cry: 'Don't let's part like this, Auntie Vi—it isn't fair on me—it's hideously unjust——'

But she said nothing. Mrs. Riverson gave no sign of softness, and Judy did not mean to risk a rebuff. She had been humiliated enough for one night. She thought bitterly:

'Aunt Violet never cared for me—always hated me being here—and now she's glad to turn me out.'

At the door, Mrs. Riverson turned back to the girl.

'Of course, if Maurice Fairvill does the right and proper thing, he will marry you,' she said, and closed the door after her.

Judy stared at the door, a handkerchief to her lips. She began to laugh hysterically. There was something ludicrous in the suggestion that Maurice should marry her—'make an honest woman of her.'

The laughter trembled into tears. For the second time that night, Judy sat down on her bed and gave way to bitter weeping.

CHAPTER 6

THERE was no getting away from the fact that Judy's luck was out.

She was up and dressed, ready to leave Grey Chesters, by half-past seven that next morning. She was determined not to interview her uncle, and not to see Kink or Carol again. She would not take Uncle Charles's money, and she did not want to be involved in another, long futile explanation of affairs. Nobody except Kink understood.

She ate a slice of bread-and-butter with her early morning cup of tea, and told May, the house-parlourmaid, that she did not want any breakfast. She had telephoned for a taxi, and she was going to catch an early train from Chichester to London before the family were aware of her departure. They were never called until eight o'clock.

She wrote a note of thanks and gratitude for the Colonel and left it on his desk in his study. Her chief regrets lay in leaving him—and dear old Kink. Kink—the only person on earth who really cared for her. For Carol, who had been like a sister, and whom she had so admired and adored, Judy had no love left. Carol had killed it . . . frozen it up by that ice-hard treatment she had meted out to Judy since her 'confession.'

Judy felt a natural pang when she said good-bye to the old

home. She had loved this place. After she had put on coat and hat, she stood for a long while at her bedroom window, looking down at the garden. It looked grey and chill this dark January morning, but Judy, who knew every tree and bush and flower-bed, found it beautiful. It had been her home.

Over the trees lay that vista of sea which she loved; a grey, desolate sea to-day, flecked with white horses. A stiff wind was blowing up from the south-west. Judy, as a rule, did not mind the wind. She was used to it. But this morning it filled her with melancholy. She felt sad and afraid of what lay before her.

She had made a gigantic sacrifice for Carol, and this banishment, in disgrace, was the issue of it. The happiness she had known here as a child, as a girl, had gone for ever. The idea of London—of the search for a job—did not depress her unduly. She even looked forward to working. But this exile—a complete cut from the family at Grey Chesters, and old associations, took the heart out of her.

The memory of Maurice, and his share in this *débâcle*, was equally calculated to reduce her spirits to low ebb. It was so awful to think that because of her he, too, was exiled, and lonely and heartbroken.

'Thank God, I've got Nome,' Judy thought as she turned from her window and walked downstairs very quietly, to avoid waking the household.

She intended to go straight to Naomi, who had a charming house in a mews near Marble Arch. But of course she could not stay there long. Dear old Naomi—who had been her closest friend at school—would probably beg her to stay as long as she liked. But Judy had no intention of being a burden on her friend. Besides which, Naomi had only been married a year, and Bart, her husband, would not want a third person in the home. He was literary editor of a big newspaper, and a cheery friendly creature who had been extremely nice to Judy on the few occasions when they had met.

Bart would, perhaps, help her get a job. But Judy made up

her mind that she must not encroach on the hospitality of the Graynes for more than a short period.

She met May in the hall, sorting out letters which had just arrived.

'One for you, Miss Judy.'

Judy took the letter and glanced at it. Naomi's big, loopy handwriting. Why was she writing—when she knew she would see her this morning? A premonition that all was not well gripped Judy. She scanned what her friend had written and then stared blankly at the luggage which May had brought down, locked, strapped, ready for the taxi.

Naomi could not have her after all!

'I'm dreadfully sorry to put you off at the last moment, Ju, dear, but I had a phone call from Edinburgh last night. My father is very ill and not expected to live, and I'm going straight up on the night mail. Bart, bless him, is coming with me. I'm sure you'll understand. Keep in touch with me—of course you must stay with us when we get back. Meanwhile, I daresay you can hang on at Selsey for a bit, can't you?

'Always yours with love,

'NOME'

Judy's spirits sank to zero. Poor old Naomi—affectionately called Nome by her intimates. She adored her father and all her family. Scots of the finest type, who lived in Edinburgh. Judy knew she would be heart-broken if Mr. Macintyre died. And here was a pretty kettle of fish for her, Judy. Without the haven of Nome's house, she had nowhere to go.

The hired car from Chichester rolled up to the front door. Judy went out to meet it, her face pale and a little pinched in the grey light of the cold winter's morning. A strong gust of wind almost blew her off her feet. She pulled the tweed cap-hat, which matched her coat, more firmly over her hair.

'Well, that's that,' she thought gloomily. 'I can't go to Nome. I must find a room for myself somewhere.'

She began to wonder if she had been a little foolish to reject her uncle's offer of financial support. But nothing would have induced her to go to him now and ask for it. She had twenty-one pounds in her bag. The full extent of her savings. She had been buying National certificates for some time now—firmly resisting the temptation to spend every penny on clothes. Not because she did not want lots of pretty things badly, but because she had always felt a trifle sore about the fact that she relied entirely on her uncle for everything. She had made up her mind to save, because that was the one and only sure way of making oneself independent.

She was thankful, to-day, for the meagre amount. Twenty-one pounds would not go far, but it was better than nothing.

May, the little maid, who knew nothing of the tragedy, and fully expected to see Miss Judy back ere long, bade her good-bye brightly when the driver put the cabin-trunk and a suitcase in the car.

'See you again, soon, miss,' she said.

Judy could only nod and smile dumbly. She climbed into the car, wondering what on earth she was going to do, now that fate had dealt this fresh blow and removed the Graynes and their home from the scene. Where was she going to-night?

The driver slammed the door after her. She looked out. Good-bye to Grey Chesters and the family. The cold wind stung her cheeks, and the hot tears swam in her eyes. Then she saw a fair, boyish head leaning out of an upper window. Kink, frantically calling her.

'Judy! Judy—you can't go like this! Judy—wait a minute!'

But she set her teeth and told the taxi-man to drive on. It was much better not to see Kink any more; for all their sakes. But it was some slight comfort to her to know that he cared.

During that drive along the twisting, turning road that led from Selsey to Chichester, Judy scarcely saw a thing. She wiped the tears away, fiercely determined not to give way to them, but she looked miserably at the familiar scenery. When the tall grey spires of the Cathedral came in view, delicately beautiful against the windy, stormy sky, she roused herself. Her brain started working again.

'Where shall I go to-night? What can I do? How can I possibly find work—without Nome and Bart to help me?'

The problem was still unsolved when she stood on the platform at Chichester Station waiting for the train to London. She shivered with cold and nerves. She had not even had the heart to buy a morning paper. She knew she would never read a line of it.

Suddenly a tall, familiar figure came striding down the platform; a man wearing a dark grey coat and white muffler; carrying a suitcase in one hand; the other steadying his hat which was in danger of being blown from his head as the sharp wind tore along the platform.

As soon as Judy saw him the blood rushed to her cheeks and her heart began to thump wildly. Maurice—Maurice, bound for London, like herself.

He came within a yard of her, glanced up, saw her, and stopped abruptly. She thought how ill he looked. Ill and grim. She wondered if he would cut her dead. But he did nothing like that. He looked from her to the porter who stood behind her with the cabin trunk on his trolley.

'Where are you going?' he said, without any preliminaries.

'Up to Town,' she said, and wished her cheeks would not colour so violently and display the awful embarrassment which she was feeling.

'That your luggage?'

'Yes.'

'You're off for some time, then?'

'For good.'

'What do you mean—for good?'

He came nearer her. Judy's lashes flickered nervously. If only he would not look at her in that grim, ironic way—it was so crushing.

'Naturally I can't live at Grey Chesters any more.'

'Whose idea is this?'

'Mine—in a way. But Auntie Vi wouldn't have me in the house after—after——' She paused, stammering.

Maurice frowned harder. He could guess, without being told further details, what had happened. He knew his Mrs. Riverson. Because he had loved Carol so passionately, he had tried to like Carol's mother. But she had never inspired any real feeling in him. She was not a sympathetic woman. The hard and prudish side of her had always checked his affection for her. Like Judy, he had never until now guessed that so much of the mother lay in the daughter. Carol's behaviour in the face of his supposed infidelity had been an astonishment as well as a blow to Maurice.

He could imagine Mrs. Riverson's righteous indignation against her niece. Judy had been 'turned out.' That was the unvarnished truth about this sudden departure of the girl with all her belongings. The Colonel, and the boy, Kink, might have taken a more lenient view of the matter. But at Grey Chesters Mrs. Riverson's word was law.

Last night, when Maurice left Grey Chesters, he had intended never to see Judy again. He did not want to see her. She had done him too great an injury. But here she was, literally thrown across his path again, and, unsympathetic though he was, he had to admit she looked thoroughly dejected. Turned out—in disgrace. Only what she deserved, of course, but what the deuce was the child going to do?

He refused to admit that he was in any way responsible for her; nevertheless, he found himself questioning her about her plans.

'Where are you off to? You haven't any relatives—at least Carol once told me you had nobody except her family.'

'That's quite true.'

'Then where are you going?'

'I—don't know.'

'You mean you've been chucked out by Mrs. Riverson and you haven't got a soul to go to?'

'I—shall find somewhere. Please don't bother,' said Judy, tilting her head.

The somewhat pathetic attempt at dignity made him frown the harder. Damn it, he refused to feel sorry for Judy. She was responsible for all the trouble—both his and her own—and a consummate little liar into the bargain. He hardened his heart against her.

'You've only yourself to blame for this, my child.'

'I'm quite aware of that.' Her nostrils quivered.

'I daresay the Riversons imagine you're coming to me—your supposed lover, eh?' said Maurice brutally.

Judy caught her breath and put a nervous hand up to her throat; drew the fur collar of her tweed coat more tightly together.

'Well—they'll be wrong—if they harbour any such idea,' she said, stammering.

'You're responsible for any crazy ideas they may harbour. I've been asking myself, all night, what in God's name made you concoct such a damnable story.'

'Please,' said Judy, 'don't let's discuss it all over again. You know the reason.'

'I know your reason, and it's a rotten one,' he muttered.

He knew that he was not making her load any lighter. But he was still raw with resentment, and he had had a wakeful night. He had taken more aspirin than was good for him in order to try and get down the fever. The fever had certainly gone this morning, but he felt thick in the head; irritable. And all the aspirin in the world could not deaden the pain in his heart which was for Carol. He was finding her ready acceptance of Judy's tale, and her engagement to another man, very bitter pills to swallow.

Judy stood dumbly before him, covered in confusion. He opened his lips to say something more, then changed his

mind. The train was just steaming in.

'We'd better travel up together and talk things over,' he said curtly.

'There's nothing to talk over,' she began, but the roar of the incoming train drowned her protest. Maurice took command, and bade the porter put her luggage into a first-class carriage which stopped in front of them.

'I've got a third-class ticket.' Judy made another feeble protest. Maurice ignored it.

When they were in the carriage, which was overheated but a relief after the icy draughts of the platform, Maurice slammed the door, flung himself into a corner opposite her, and pulled a packet of cigarettes from his coat pocket.

'I'll pay the excess for you,' he said in the short, almost rough voice which was so changed from the kindly and cheerful one of the old Maurice. 'The thirds look full, and we must talk.'

'But what about?' asked Judy forlornly.

'You. What you're going to do.'

'It doesn't concern you,' she said, swallowing hard.

Maurice hunched his shoulders, lit his cigarette, and flung the used match through the window as the train steamed out of Chichester. What Judy meant to do certainly need not concern him. He did not know what actually prompted him to travel up with her like this and enter into any discussion of the kind. But he felt, vaguely, some kind of responsibility. Their names were coupled. She had coupled them—he was guiltless on that score. But the thing had been done, and she had been banished by her indignant aunt. She had no money, no other relations. And, however badly she had behaved, she was a girl, and young at that. It was not an enviable position for her. He regarded her gloomily.

'Judy,' he said, 'you've done a damn silly thing, you know.'

'Yes.' She set her teeth and answered him. 'But I did it—out of love for Carol.'

'Well, you see the result. Chaos for all of us.'

'Do you want me to go on apologising?' Judy asked, torn between sudden hatred of Maurice and the desire to fling herself at his feet and humble herself utterly. His eyes were so bitter, so unhappy. She couldn't bear to think what he was suffering—through her.

'No—apologies aren't the slightest use. We'll cut them out. But facts remain. You and I are supposed to have been lovers—and you've been asked to quit Grey Chesters because of that fact. You can't just land in London without any idea in your head what you mean to do. God knows what might happen to you.'

'I don't much care,' said Judy.

'Exactly. So you'll need a bit of supervision.'

His eyes were derisive. Judy's fighting spirit suddenly flared through her misery.

'Oh, you needn't think I—I shall do anything silly. And, even if I did, what does it matter to you? You loathe me. I've taken Carol from you. I'm not surprised if you do hate the sight of me. And I can't imagine why you're even interested—whether I starve or go to—t-the devil—or not.'

Maurice smiled grimly. Judy was such a child, for all her twenty-three years, and so dramatic. Despite his resentment, his natural bitterness, he was not devoid of understanding. He told himself that he supposed Judy had acted out of her love for Carol. But he could not accustom himself to the manner in which she had proved it. That story—that they had spent a night together—Maurice's lips tightened again.

'What *do* you intend to do?' he rapped out.

'I—don't really know. I was going to stay with Naomi Grayne—my school-friend. But—she's away. I want to look for work——'

'What can you do?'

'Nothing much,' said Judy, colouring painfully. And she thought: 'I wish he wouldn't go on asking me questions—hating me all the time. I suppose he likes to make me writhe.'

Maurice smoked in silence a moment. Through narrowed eyelids he looked at Judy. His gaze travelled from the dark

bobbed head—she had taken off her cap—down the attractive, youthful figure in the tweed coat—to the glimpse of slim legs in silk stockings; the small, narrow feet in tan, well-polished shoes.

A decidedly pretty girl, Judy Farrell. Charming enough to suit any man's taste. A queer thing, thought Maurice Fairvill, how circumstances alter a person's outlook. In the old days, sex had never entered into his feelings for Carol's cousin. Naturally enough, because then he had been very much in love with Carol. Her delicate, blonde, appealing beauty had blinded him to any particular charm in Judy, with her gipsy colouring and totally different personality. But now he regarded Judy perforce, more intimately. Judy had told the Riversons that he had been her lover. She had been willing to let them all imagine that she had stayed with him. The more he thought about it the more baffled he was by the whole business.

A good many men would feel delighted to be labelled as Judy's lover. He found himself wondering, grimly, if she knew anything at all about love or loving.

'I might try and get a secretarial job of some kind,' her forlorn voice cut across his reflections. 'I can type. I've typed business letters on Uncle Charles's machine. Or I—can do a domestic job. I can sew a bit—or look after children.'

'I wonder you don't go on the stage,' said Maurice. 'You seem to have a distinct talent for acting.'

Judy pressed her hands together.

'If you enjoy being beastly to me—go on. I know you're justified.'

'It just struck me you might become a great emotional actress—since you were able to impress everybody with the truth of your story about our secret love-affair.'

'Yes,' said Judy, white-lipped.

Maurice, feeling no better for having vented this sarcasm upon Judy, added morosely:

'You won't find it easy to get any sort of job just at the present moment. Conditions in England are none too good. I

only wish I could get back to Hankow, and that one of those Chinese devils who got hold of me would put an end to *my* torture. I've nothing much to live for now.'

'And I'm to blame,' said Judy, choking. She suddenly leaned forward and looked up at him, her big brown eyes full of tears. 'Oh, Maurice, Maurice, I'm so terribly sorry. I know you must have had a dreadful time in China!'

He avoided looking into those wet, velvety eyes. A woman in tears always unnerved Maurice. He hunched himself in his corner and folded his arms over his chest.

'It wasn't too bright. I had a few words with one of my boys; lost my temper with him, and his relatives got me, one night; hustled me into a junkshop and took me into the interior. They gave me a rough time. . . . ' He touched the angry scar across his cheek. . . . 'I got the worst of it, putting up a fight. They meant to do me in at once, but thought better of it. They decided to get money for me instead. Naturally nobody was going to put up a fortune for my life, so the devils sent a note to Faraday to say they'd murdered me. That's where the mistake was made. Faraday was convinced I was dead. But I got away. I'd done a service to one of the Chinks, and he helped me escape. Then the firm cabled to Faraday to send me back at once. Thought I'd do better in London. They've put up my salary and made me general manager of the Far East Tea Company offices in Town. There are several of 'em, and it's a big job, with good pay for these days. I meant to marry Carol as soon as I got home.'

He broke off abruptly. He had momentarily forgotten his differences with Judy while he poured out his story. She listened to him, her eyes, blurred with tears, fixed intently on him. When he stopped, she sat back and put a hand to her forehead.

'Oh, Maurice, how ghastly it must have been—what a mess it all is! I'd do anything—anything—to make things right again. But I can't. Kink is the only one who believes me. Carol won't listen—what can I do?'

'Nothing,' he said. 'And neither can I. That's the devil of it. Your tale, told from no matter what high motive, has most effectively broken up things for Carol and myself.'

Judy shut her eyes and pressed the back of her hand against them. Then she heard Maurice's voice; the rough note in it again:

'I'm in much the same position as you are, my dear Judy. Not a relative—not even a pal I want to go and stay with. And, after I've shown up at the London head office this morning, I've got three weeks' holiday. I meant it to be my honeymoon. *Honeymoon!*' He laughed bitterly.

She looked at him blindly.

'I'll do anything—to make up for it.'

The old impulsive Judy, passionately eager to serve those she loved. And she did love Maurice Fairvill. She knew it. Loved him terribly. It *was* terrible . . . under the circumstances.

He gave her a queer, swift look and said:

'You'd better come away with me and have that wonderful night which you appear to have described so beautifully to Carol. Why should I be the poor lonely fellow from the East, when my supposed partner-in-guilt is in Town with nothing to do but console me?'

'You said something of that sort last night. Maurice—it's not fair——'

'Were you fair to me?'

She made a helpless gesture.

'You don't mean it. Why torment me?'

'Perhaps I do mean it?'

She stared, caught that queer, fierce look in his eyes, and wilted under it, red-hot with shame.

'*Maurice!*'

'Well—*you* told the story. Not I. Aren't you brave enough to make it come true?'

'If I thought you really needed me—if I imagined I could make up for what I've done—I'd even be willing to say "yes" to that.' She spoke through quivering lips, not daring to meet

his ironic gaze. 'Yes, I would—because I owe it to you. I admit I do. But you don't want me. You hate me.'

'You've done everything to make me hate you, Judy,' he said slowly, 'but I'm not sure I don't want you as a companion for my holiday.'

CHAPTER 7

NOT for some time could Judy summon up sufficient courage to speak to Maurice again. She sat very still, both hands pressed tightly round her bag. It was a nice crocodile bag which Kink had given her for Christmas. Staring at it blindly, Judy remembered Christmas and shivered. It was on Christmas Eve that she had made the desperate effort to help Carol. To-day she sat here in a railway carriage opposite Maurice and realised that she had ruined both his happiness and hers by the crazy things she had done that night.

And here was Maurice suggesting that she should go away with him for a 'holiday.' Not because he cared for her in the least. Only because it must seem to him a subtle form of revenge.

She suddenly lifted her eyes to him, saw him looking at her sardonically, and burst out:

'How can you *possibly* want me to—to be your companion—when you hate the sight of me?'

'Oh, but I don't, my dear child. You're a very pleasant sight. Much better-looking than you used to be.'

Judy writhed.

'Maurice, don't be so—so *beastly*!'

'Sorry. But this thing's got me on the raw. I feel—beastly—as you call it.'

'Oh, I know I'm to blame, and I deserve all this, but—but it can't do any good just to—sneer at me so.'

'I'm past sneering. I'm just telling you definitely that I'd like you for my companion when I start off on my holiday.'

'Why?'

He shrugged his shoulders, then smiled at her. She was crushed by the bitterness in that smile.

'Because you'll amuse me, I daresay.'

'*Amuse* you!'

'Well—won't you?'

'I don't suppose I shall be very—amusing,' she said, scarlet-cheeked. Dark thick lashes hid the pain in the big brown eyes. 'But I still say that I—owe it to you to—do anything you ask—so if you mean it—I'll come with you.'

Maurice moved restless in his corner, found another cigarette and lit it from the fag-end of the one he was smoking. If only Judy would not be so humble, so penitent! She made him feel an absolute brute. Damn it, why should he be made to feel like that, when the whole wretched business was the result of her iniquitous story? She was a crazy, impulsive child—always carried away by the fervent desire to sacrifice herself for people. She had made herself out to be a little rotter for Carol's sake. But then she loved Carol. Why she should be willing to sacrifice herself now, for him, he did not know. So far as he knew, she certainly had no particular affection for him. She was just being carried away by the fervour of her remorse. No doubt she was truly sorry for what she had done. But the harm was done. It was not much good Judy being sorry.

For an instant Maurice felt like saying:

'Oh, forget the whole thing—go your way and I'll go mine. I don't want your company or any other woman's. I'm through with women—if they can't be more loyal, more faithful than Carol has been!'

But he did not make that speech. He was tempted in a queer way to carry on with this game of revenge and make Judy pay for the rotten turn she had done him. He was not ordinarily vindictive. It was just that his normal, kindly generous outlook was temporarily warped. Not easily would

he recover from the shock of his reception at Grey Chesters after the hell he had been through in China.

He turned his gaze upon the girl opposite him. Heavens, how unhappy she looked! Her pretty face was all flushed and puckered, like a child's, as though she were about to cry.

'Cheer up, Judy,' he said in a grim voice. 'We aren't dead yet, and we might put in quite a pleasant few days together somewhere.'

Her heart beat fast—faster than it had ever beaten in Judy's whole life.

'You really mean it?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Very well,' she said in a small voice, but she felt scarcely able to breathe. Maurice was in all seriousness asking her to go away with him—*to amuse him.* She had said that she would go because she owed it to him. Hadn't she robbed him of Carol and his honeymoon? Well, she wouldn't back out of it now. But she felt completely overwhelmed by the knowledge that it *amused* him to humiliate her so completely. With all her nerves jangling, Judy tried to speak calmly to him.

'What do you want me to do, Maurice? Just tell me and I'll do it.'

'Let's consider the story you told Carol. You and I spent a night in Town, didn't we?'

Judy clenched both hands tightly in her lap. There was no colour in her face now, but she set her teeth and looked at Maurice steadily.

'That's what I . . . said.'

'And which hotel did we favour?'

'I didn't give any particular name.'

'I see. And Carol didn't want details?'

'No.'

'Funny,' he said in a brooding voice. 'Funny that she should have swallowed it so easily—yet you all tell me she was going crazy because she thought I was dead.'

'Carol was built like that, I think. She's frightfully proud——'

'Prudish, you mean,' put in Maurice with a curt laugh. 'The mere idea that I'd been physically unfaithful was enough to horrify her to such an extent that she cut me out of the circle of her thoughts—at once.'

'Yes, so it appears.'

'You two aren't alike, are you, in spite of your close relationship?' he said with another short laugh. 'You're no prude, Judy.'

'No,' she said, biting her lips.

'I thought you were a very good little girl in the old days,' he went on. 'I wouldn't have dreamed that you could even conceive such a story as you told Carol.'

The colour flamed to Judy's cheeks again.

'It—I didn't start off with such a story. It just—grew.'

'You have a vivid imagination, my dear.'

She made no answer. He added:

'You won't mind, will you, Judy, if I ask you if you have ever done that sort of thing before? I mean——'

'Oh, no *no*,' she broke in passionately. 'I've *never* done such a thing, Maurice, it was just a story . . . a wild tale——'

'Wild enough,' he said drily. 'All right! Don't look like that! I'll believe you.'

Judy sat still and put her hands up to her flaming face. Maurice watched her, his thin, tired face puckered. He thought: 'Heavens, what an intense child she is! No wonder she found it simple to concoct her story of our "night of love." Yet I don't suppose she cares a damn about me, personally. This is sheer quixotic belief that she ought to go to any lengths to compensate me.'

For an instant he was touched by the generosity which prompted Judy's behaviour. Then he hardened his heart again.

'We won't pretend to be in love with each other, because that would be too absurd,' he said. 'We'll just behave like the two solitary creatures which we are, neither having any ties nor anyone to care what becomes of us, and join forces in

order to try and extract a little—well, shall we call it consolation?—out of life.'

Judy took her hands away from her face. She nodded dumbly. But she knew quite definitely that she *was* in love with this man and always had been, even in the days when he was Carol's lover and companion. She hadn't allowed the feeling to expand then. And, now that this preposterous situation had arisen—a situation in which she found herself agreeing to go away with Maurice, for their 'mutual consolation'—she felt nothing but bitter shame. Never, whatever happened, would she let Maurice see that she cared; that he had such power to hurt her. She raised her head, and faced him almost defiantly.

'You needn't speak in the plural, Maurice. *You* may find it consoling, but I—I shan't.'

He opened his eyes wide, in mock astonishment.

'But come, Judy; let's keep to the true story. You didn't tell Carol you let me make love to you just to amuse *me*, did you? Your tale was that you flung yourself into my arms and that I, tired of her prudishness, seized you gladly.'

Judy hovered on the brink of hating him. Oh, that horrible dry sarcasm!

'I'm glad you can keep your sense of humour,' she said coldly.

'Well, isn't it so? Didn't you tell Carol that you adored me?'

'Yes,' she said reluctantly, under her breath.

'Ah!' He leaned back in his corner, arms folded over his chest. 'Well, it's most comforting to be adored. Do make it come true, Judy. And do throw yourself into my arms today. It will be a new experience for me. I seem to have done all the adoring in the past.'

She winced.

'Maurice, I wish you wouldn't be so dreadfully bitter.'

'Can you wonder?'

'No. But what real happiness are you going to get out of—all this?'

'Quite a lot. It's a piquant situation. And any man is

flattered when a charming girl flings herself so passionately into his arms that he cannot resist her.'

'Maurice,' said an agonised Judy. 'That was only what I *said*.'

He suddenly dropped his cigarette on the floor, stamped on it, and leaning forward, took her hands and pulled her over to him. She found herself on the seat beside him; his arms about her. With a swift, rough movement, he ruffled her thick dark hair.

'You must live up to your story, Judy. I'm damned lonely and disappointed. If you're really sorry, show that you are. Listen to me. If I'd really wanted you to be nice to me before I went to China, would you have done it?'

'No . . . no . . . never.' She whispered the words. She was trembling from head to foot in his arms. It was both torment and delight to be held like this against him and to feel the hard beat of his heart close to hers. But she was broken by the knowledge of the feelings that prompted him to do and say these things to her.

'You wouldn't have come?' he persisted.

'No. You belonged to Carol.'

'I see. You were merely willing to pretend that you had no morals in order to make her believe that *I* had none.'

'If you must put it that way—yes.'

'But I wouldn't have taken you away, little Judy,' he went on, still threading his fingers through her hair. 'I was quite a moral young man, you know.'

She could hardly bear the sensation of those caressing fingers. She hated and loathed him to make love to her lightly because he was a lonely embittered man.

'We'll forget about that now,' he added. 'We'll just get what we can out of life. You don't dislike me, do you?'

'No,' she said in a stifled voice.

'Then let's live your wonderful story, Judy. I want a little love, a little comfort. You've been chucked out of the home circle, and you want someone to look after you. Where shall we go? What shall we do?'

'Oh, I don't know!' she said brokenly, and hid her face against his shoulder.

He was struck, as he had been struck at Grey Chesters last night, by the appealing femininity of this girl; the softness of her in his arms; the fragrance of her hair. It mounted a little to his head. He put a finger under her chin, turned her face up to his, and kissed her on the lips.

It was the first time Maurice had ever kissed her, and the caress was not a light one. It was long and passionate. His brown cheek was warm and rough against hers. Judy breathed fast, and there was not a vestige of colour in her face when he let her go again. She just sat motionless, her ruffled head bowed, her eyes shut.

He, slightly ashamed of himself, thrust his hands in his coat pockets and tried to laugh.

'That begins our holiday. I can't exactly accuse you of throwing yourself into my arms to-day, my dear. Your lips are as chilly and unresponsive as ice.'

'What did you expect?' she said, and the blood beat back to her face again violently.

'Nothing, really. I'm learning to expect nothing. It's better —then you don't have so many disappointments.'

She looked up at him dumbly. She was tempted to do what he suggested and throw herself into his arms. She wanted to feel the rough passion of his embrace again, and wanted to put her lips to his and prove to him that she was far from chilly or unresponsive. But she could not let him guess that she was madly and hopelessly in love with him. It would be the final degradation for her if he got so much as an inkling of the truth. Poor Maurice—poor, wronged, disappointed Maurice. If only it lay in her power to make him happy again; if only she were capable of really compensating him for the loss of Carol! But she knew, intuitively, that just now, when he had kissed her, his passion had been merely a physical thing. His mind was still with the girl he had wanted for his wife.

In unhappy silence she sat there, neither moving nor speaking for a while.

When Maurice looked at her again, tears were glittering on her lashes. He thought what absurdly long lashes they were, and the tears touched him, made him half remorseful, because of the kiss he had just placed upon that sorrowful young mouth. But he could not easily forget that she had separated him from Carol. Life was going to be empty now without that woman, that home he had wanted, dreamed of through those hellish days in China. Maurice's was a curiously complex nature. Half of him revolted against this thing he meant to do; he was ashamed of himself for bullying Judy. The other half wanted to punish her. After all, she had ruined his life, and it was up to him to build what he could out of the wreckage.

'For the lord's sake,' he said, 'don't cry! It isn't going to help matters.'

Judy tilted her head.

'I'm not crying. I'm only beginning to realise it doesn't pay to try and make sacrifices for people one loves. Selfish people seem to get the best time out of life.'

'I quite agree that it doesn't pay to make sacrifices for a person with one hand and ruin somebody else with the other,' he said. Then in an angry voice he added: 'Oh, let's cut it out. I am sick of the subject.'

'So am I,' she whispered.

He busied himself lighting another cigarette. Surreptitiously she raised a finger and brushed away the tell-tale tears. She must preserve a little pride, she told herself miserably. She must not let Maurice see how terribly he'd hurt her.

'Look here,' he said, after a pause, 'when we get to Town what do you mean to do?'

'I don't know.'

'I presume you haven't a cent.'

'Oh, yes, I have. A little that I've saved.'

'H'm! Well, if it's all you've got it's all you're likely to have. It won't be easy for you to get a job. However, I'm going to manage this show, Judy.'

'Why should you——' she began to ask.

'Because here we've been chucked out together, so to speak,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'You started the thing. Now I'd better go on with it.'

'I don't understand you, I'm afraid,' she said in a low voice.

'I'm not analysing myself this morning. I'm taking a leaf out of your book, my child, and acting on the spur of the moment. Look here, last night when I got back to my hotel I phoned up a pal of mine—Jack Lister, who was in China with me a year ago. He has a little service flat near Victoria. He's just off abroad with relations, and he offered to lend me his flat. We'd better take a taxi straight there when we get up to Town. Then we'll make up our minds what we're going to do next.'

'I'm sure I ought to go to a hotel by myself,' she said helplessly.

'No, Judy, you've made me responsible for you now, and don't forget you've got to live up to this romance of comforting the lonely man from the East.'

She saw that it was futile to battle against his sarcasm. And for the moment he was stronger than she was. She was so unhappy that she didn't care what happened to her or where she went or what she did. And of course she did not really believe that Maurice meant what he said about their holiday together. That wasn't possible. This was his way of getting even with her for what she had done to him. But he wouldn't keep it up much longer.

When just now he had taken her in his arms and kissed her, something strangely sweet and wild had leapt within her, although her lips had not answered the caress. She knew that she had loved Maurice in the old days when he had been Carol's lover, and that now she would love him all her life. How strange and terrible to think that in an unguarded moment she, who would have done anything for his sake, had signed the death-warrant to his happiness.

'Well, here we are,' said Maurice.

Judy stood up, swaying a little on her feet. She looked into the long mirror which hung between two advertisements of the sunny south coast and tried to restore order to her face and hair. Maurice's fingers had roughened that hair. Even now her heart beat wildly at the memory of his fleeting passion. How different things would have been if he had really wanted to hold and kiss her like that! How much she could have given him! How much she would give him, even now, if she could but make amends.

She took a little compactum from her bag and powdered her nose forlornly. Maurice turned and watched her.

'Charming,' he said drily. 'You really *are* pretty, Judy. What about the lipstick?'

'I don't use it!' she said with a hot flush, and this time there was an angry spark in her eyes.

'Good for you,' he said. 'It isn't really attractive. I don't know why girls do it—they make a mistake if they think men like to see a woman's mouth looking like a nasty gash.'

Judy sat down again. She wondered gloomily how Maurice could be flippant at a time like this. Her own sense of humour was sadly wanting this morning.

The train steamed into the dimness of Victoria Station. Maurice stood up and put on his hat.

'We'll get a porter,' he said. 'I can't manage the three suitcases.'

She thought what an absurd position it was—she, Judy Farrell, arriving at Victoria with luggage, in Maurice Fairvill's company, just as though it were perfectly normal and natural for them to take a journey together.

He liked the piquancy of the situation. Hadn't he told her so? But she was filled with a sense of despair, because she was in love with him now in a way that she had never thought possible.

CHAPTER 8

JACK LISTER'S flat was in St. John's Court, close to Buckingham Palace Road. It was right at the top of the building, and had rather a wonderful view on a fine day. But Maurice and Judy emerged from the station straight into the gloom of a fog this winter's morning, and even in the top flat it was so dark to-day that all the lights had to be switched on.

The atmosphere did not tend to lessen Judy's depression. Lister, according to Maurice, was a man of artistic temperament, fond of music and books. The flat was charmingly furnished. There were two bookcases full of attractive volumes, in the drawing-room, a baby-grand piano, and an electric gramophone. Judy, had she felt more at ease, would have delighted in the two delightful water-colours, both by Sickert, against the brown papered walls, and in the cheerful orange chintz of curtains and chair-covers. But she was much too miserable to take any pleasure in her surroundings.

A porter had brought them and their luggage up in the lift; deposited them in the flat, and given Maurice a letter from his friend. The key of the flat was enclosed in it.

Maurice, strolling round the sitting-room, hands in pockets, said:

'Awfully nice chap, Lister. Decent of him to let me have this place. It's most attractive, isn't it? He said I'm to make use of it to my heart's content. There are two bedrooms and a bathroom——'

Judy suddenly broke out passionately:

'I can't possibly stay here with you.'

Maurice paused in front of her, cocking an eyebrow sardonically.

'Wind up, my dear? Not finding it so simple to be a young man's consolation in fact as it was in fiction?'

'You can sneer at me all you like,' she said, white and trembling, 'and I may deserve everything you say to me, but I can't deliberately stay here in this flat with you and you can't want me to either. You hate the sight of me.'

'Oh, no, I don't. You're much too pretty and attractive for any man to hate.'

'How intolerable you are!'

'I quite agree. I'm not finding myself very tolerable at the moment. But let's face the situation without being dramatic. Down at Grey Chesters they all imagine that you and I behaved very badly behind Carol's back. You were turned out and Carol has no further use for me. Why not get what we can out of life together?'

Judy set her teeth. It was all so cold-blooded. Of course, Maurice did not realise what it meant to her. She could not cheerfully accept the prospect of snatching feverishly at whatever life offered them—just because they were both victims of a hideous blunder. She cared about him too much for that.

'I can't and won't stay here,' she repeated.

'You're going to back out?'

'I know that you don't really want me,' she said, breathing hard and fast. 'And I won't stay here just because you think there's nothing else for me to do. I shall go to a hotel and look after myself, and if I can't get a job, and all my money goes, I'll ask Uncle Charles to help me—rather than take help from you.'

Maurice poised himself on the edge of an armchair. He had taken off his coat and muffler. She thought with a sudden pang how thin and ill he looked in the strong electric light.

'Not very fond of me this morning, are you? However did

you manage to make Carol believe that you gladly flung yourself into my manly arms?'

Judy lost control of herself.

'Oh, *don't* go on like this,' she said, stamping her foot. 'I can't stand it. I won't! I'm going now, this minute.'

He looked at the furious young face, the tense angry young body, and felt a sudden respect for her. What a queer, impulsive creature she was! No weakling really. Plenty of spirit in Judy Farrell.

He wondered what she would do. He was interested to find out.

'Well, where are you going?'

'Anywhere,' she said wildly.

'You won't stay here—you mean that?'

'Definitely.' She pulled her coat about her and held her head high, her cheeks flaming. 'I'll ask the porter to take my luggage down again.'

The desire to keep her forcibly was short-lived in Maurice. He stood up and followed her to the door.

'Oh, all right. What's it matter? What does anything matter? The whole damn show is a farce. You'd better go to the Eccleston. It isn't far from here and it's a nice quiet place. I'll get a taxi for you.'

The passion of anger and revolt died in Judy. She was pale and subdued when she stood beside Maurice in the gloom of the fog and watched a somewhat astonished porter put her luggage in the taxi. What a wretched day it was! The cold and damp of the fog seemed to creep into one's bones. Now that she was about to depart, a perverse little feeling entered her, and she wished she had not left that attractive flat and Maurice's company. No matter how hateful he was, it meant something to her to be with him. But here she was of her own volition driving to absolute loneliness. Well, what else could she have done?

Maurice, on his part, felt again that queer sense of responsibility towards her. She was so young, so impulsive, and she looked desperately miserable.

'Look here, Judy,' he said, as she climbed into the taxi, 'let's call pax, as the kids say. It's no use our going on like this. I've been brutal—I know it—but the whole damn thing's made a brute out of me. At the same time I suppose you did what you did from the best motives, even though it's turned out for the worst.'

His sudden change to kindliness brought her perilously near to tears. It was the first time since the beginning of the wretched affair that he had displayed even a glimmer of understanding; of insight into her side of the thing. She answered him in a choked little voice:

'I don't blame you for being brutal, but it won't do much good, will it?'

'Perhaps not. Look here, I'll tell you what we'll do. You go along and get your room at the Eccleston. I'm going down to the City. I've got to put in an appearance at the office. When I'm through, I'll pick you up at the hotel and we'll have a spot of lunch somewhere.'

Judy bit her lip fiercely.

'I've got to find some work——'

'Well, you can't find that in a day. Besides——' His lips curved into a faint smile which was not unfriendly. 'Quite seriously, you owe me your company, and I don't know a soul in London except yourself whom I could take out. It's a rotten day. Everything's as bad as it can be for both of us. Let's try and forget it by doing something amusing.'

She stared at him blankly.

'If you really want me to——'

'I'll get some tickets for a show,' he said. 'I'll pick you up about one o'clock. So long.'

He slammed the taxi door and stood back as it drove away from St. John's Court. She looked out and saw him standing there, bareheaded. His tall figure and scarred face were strangely phantom-like in the enveloping fog. Then she leaned back in the taxi and covered her eyes with her hands.

What a wretched affair! A farce, he had called it. It was more than that. It was a tragedy. Her emotions were so

conflicting that she found it hard to take a grip of herself and face the situation with any clarity. She did know beyond a doubt that she was in love with Maurice Fairvill, and that she had done a dreadful thing to him. She knew also that she herself was in a tight corner. Just what the future held for her she could not begin to imagine. Neither could she understand why Maurice should demand her company. She would have understood it more easily if he had told her that he did not want ever to see her again. It made her realise, of course, how very lonely he was, and what a lot she had done him out of by her fantastic salvation of Carol.

He had no home of his own, no relations, and he had come back to England full of the longing for a woman's companionship—for his marriage, for everything which would help him to forget the horror he had been through in China. This was denied him now that Carol had cast him out. He was so unhappy that he turned even to her, Judy, for forgetfulness. Well, if her presence could serve as an anodyne—if she could do anything on earth to lighten his gloom—she certainly owed it to him. However much she dreaded his sarcasm, and the constant reminder of the part she had played in hurting him, she could not refuse to do what he asked of her.

After she had taken a small bedroom and unpacked her clothes, a very chastened and thoughtful Judy spent two solitary hours in the lounge until Maurice came to fetch her, and it was the old, impulsive Judy who met him when he came into the vestibule of the hotel. Judy, with all feelings swamped by the one big desire to prove her remorse and comfort him. She had been half afraid he would not come—that he would decide, once he was away from her, that he had not the slightest wish to take her out. She wanted the chance to help him. It was rather marvellous that she should be given the opportunity. She greeted him with an almost timid little smile which he found rather touching.

'Got your room all right?' he asked curtly—rather more curtly than he meant to speak because he was afraid of

showing her that she had touched him. He felt that nine women out of ten might have told him to go to hell after the outrageous things he had said, even though they deserved it. Judy was magnanimous—and quite obviously realised to the full her misdeeds.

'I would have been here before,' he added, 'but the fog's holding up the traffic a bit. They've got flares everywhere. There's a frightful congestion at the Mansion House, and the main office of the Far East Tea Company is in Leadenhall Street.'

Judy was immensely relieved by the lack of antagonism in his voice and manner. She walked with him down the steps of the Eccleston, coughing a little as the fog got into her throat.

'I've been unpacking,' she said. 'I've got my room. I feel somehow that I ought to let Uncle Charles and Auntie Vi know where I am. It seems so queer not to do so, but of course'—she swallowed hard—'I can't very well communicate with them. It's all impossible now.'

'I'm afraid you bit off more than you could chew when you told Carol that wild story,' said Maurice, not unkindly.

'Oh, I know that,' she said.

He hailed a taxi, helped her into it, and told the driver to take them to Scott's.

'We're both in a queer position,' he said. 'Here am I—I've just been told by my boss that I'm to be general manager of the whole company—that means a salary of a thousand a year and London as my headquarters. More than I ever hoped for this year, anyhow. I was only second in command to Faraday, who was general manager of our concerns in the Far East, but there have been two retirements and a death in the company lately, and that's given me my chance. It would have been so perfect if none of this had happened. Carol and I——' He broke off and chewed his lip. Judy, her large brown eyes tragic, stole a glance at him.

'Maurice, it makes me feel so *awful*. I know how much you love her——'

'I think I shall always care more for Carol than anybody.

She seemed so absolutely the right person for me—so absolutely sweet and gentle. God! I *can't* understand how she could have been so disloyal and so hard. It's unbelievable. Whatever tale you concocted, I can't think why she believed it.'

A look of frantic pain crossed Judy's face.

'Maurice, if we're going to spend this day together, can't we stop talking about it? Honestly, I'll do any mortal thing to show you how sorry I am—but don't keep reproaching me.'

'Sorry,' he said briefly.

'No, it's only I who ought to be sorry. You've had a rotten deal.'

'It's left me somewhat disillusioned,' he smiled grimly. 'I suppose I felt so secure—so certain of Carol. But apparently she didn't love me quite so much as I thought, otherwise, she would have had more faith. But, as you say, we'll stop talking about it once and for all.'

'Do you think I can possibly help to amuse you?' she asked wistfully.

'We'll have a good lunch and see what happens afterwards.' He gave another dry laugh.

The lunch, although excellent, was not an unqualified success. At first, Maurice talked and Judy listened, and then he became morose and quiet and she lapsed into an equally gloomy silence. He ordered wine, and drank most of the bottle—Judy was not good at drinks. They didn't suit her. The end of the meal found Maurice more cheerful, a little flushed, a little reckless.

'I've taken seats for Buchanan's show—*Stand Up and Sing*—marvellous dancing. Come along, Judy; let's go and forget our troubles.'

He took her arm and walked with her down toward the Hippodrome. She tried to respond with equal cheerfulness. But there was a horrid nagging little pain in her heart which not even the sudden friendliness of his voice and touch could dispel. She was no fool, and she knew perfectly well

that Maurice was forcing this gaiety, drugging his own pain the best way he could. He was determined, temporarily, to deaden his bitterness and his misery and his need of Carol. He no longer sneered at or reproached her. They might have been the greatest friends, but she wondered how long it would be before he came out of the haze and looked at her in hatred and disgust again. She was half inclined to run away from him, but she could not go while she thought that he had need of her.

So that strange day passed. Judy would not have been human if she had not enjoyed the show—laughed with Maurice at the jokes; marvelled, as he did, at the dancing. They came out into the fog and cold again, Maurice humming a tune under his breath.

' "*There's always to-morrow to live for to-day,*" ' he quoted. 'Well, Judy, let's live to-day—whatever we do to-morrow.'

'Oughtn't you to go back to your flat and stay there?' she said anxiously. 'Won't this fog be bad for you, with your fever?'

But Maurice was in a stubborn mood, and not for a minute would he let the forced gaiety flag. It was as though he dared not stop to think or analyse. There was the horror of China at the back of him, and the prospect of life without Carol before him; whatever happened, he must live for the day. This was London—jolly old London in a fog; Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square; and he had a pretty brown-eyed, red-lipped girl for his companion.

'My fever's gone. I'm full of beans. We'll drop in at the Piccadilly and have some tea. We'll dance. There's always a *thé-dansant* there in the afternoon.'

Judy blinked and shook her head at him. Of course, he was a little crazy. Men hated *thé-dansants*, and Maurice, in particular, despised them. She had heard him say, lots of times, at Selsey:

'I don't mind dancing at night, but I think these lounge lizards in the afternoon are a pretty bad show.'

He wasn't himself to-day. She was half afraid for him—and wholly afraid for herself. But he swept her up on the tide of his own hot-headed enthusiasm and carried her along.

They danced at the Piccadilly. It was not the first time they had danced together. In the old, cheery days at Grey Chesters, she and Kink, Caro and Maurice, used to turn back the rugs in the drawing-room and dance to the tune of the wireless. Cheery days in a way; yet even then there had been pain in Judy's heart while she had watched Carol, golden-haired, lovely, float round the room in Maurice's arms. When he had asked her, Judy, to dance with him, she had always felt that it bored him—that he only left Carol's side and asked her out of courtesy. He didn't seem bored to-day. He held her very tightly, and made a lot of foolish jokes and laughed a lot, and ordered cocktails as soon as it was six o'clock. Judy did not enjoy any of it. She laughed with him, but behind the laughter there was only heartache and the thought:

'This is all unreal—fantastic; he's just trying to forget Carol. Why, why, did I ever do anything to make him like this?'

She almost wished that he would become cold and accusing again—mention Carol's name; it would be more natural. But the name of Carol did not pass Maurice's lips again that evening. And not once did he allow Judy to relapse into a state of gloom. He gave her no time for introspection.

At half-past six, when they emerged from the hotel, there were flares everywhere, and the fog was very bad.

'We'll never get back,' said Judy.

'What's it matter?' said Maurice. 'I love a fog. My God, if you'd ever been tied up and left in the sunshine for hours on end by a lot of slit-eyed Chinese devils, you'd never want to see the sun again. You'd breathe in the fog and love it when it choked you.'

Judy, wide-eyed, paled and shuddered.

'I was forgetting—of course—oh, you poor dear!'

'Not at all poor—full of money to-day. How are we going to spend it?'

'I don't think we'd better——' she began feebly.

'We'll do another show,' he broke in. 'Something cheerful—we'll have a look at the papers and see what's on. I'll drop you at your hotel, and you can get into evening dress and I'll call for you again at a quarter to eight. Is an hour long enough for you to make yourself look all sweet and lovely?'

Judy bit nervously at her under-lip. Really, it was too absurd. Carol should have been here—it should have been Maurice and Carol who were going crazy together on the first joyous night after his return from the dead.

Maurice continued in a hilarious strain. She had never known him more boyish, more attractive, and yet there was something terrible about the reckless abandon of his mood.

They had to walk a long way through the fog before they found a taxi, and when they did find one it could only crawl back to Victoria.

Maurice stretched out his long legs and jested:

'We'll be devilish late—but who cares?'

He turned and looked at her. The small figure in the tweed suit was very quiet and the dark little head was bent, her chin tucked in the fur collar. He suddenly reached out a hand and laid it on her knee.

'You're very quiet, my child. Cheer up!'

She made no reply, because she dared not. The whole position was disturbing her to such a pitch that she hardly knew whether to smile or to weep. But the latter she must not do, for she had vowed to make up to him in whatever way she could for the wrong she had done him.

She gave a hysterical little laugh, and on a blind impulse leaned toward him. He took her in his arms and kissed her eagerly and a little roughly. Very still sat Judy in the circle of those arms, but her lips were more responsive than they had been in the train. When he let her go again, he said:

'That was very nice. How charmingly you kiss.'

She had to clench her hands very tightly, and was glad that

the dusk of the fog hid from him the scorching colour of her face.

'Oh, we *are* going to have a lovely time!' said Maurice, with his most sardonic laugh. 'You're quite a delicious companion, Judy. You sank into my arms just at the right moment. How discerning of you! You must sink into them for a little longer next time. Here we are at the Eccleston. What colour are you going to wear to-night? I must act my part property and get you some flowers to wear.'

Judy, with every nerve in her body tuned up to concert pitch, after that moment in his arms, tried to answer lightly:

'I've only got one decent evening frock—it's a sort of yellow printed chiffon with little flowers—all rather yellowy.'

'Brown eyes, black hair, yellow dress—sounds perfect. I'll see what I can do about the flowers. Till 7.45—no, we'd better make it eight o'clock now. So long. By the way—enjoying yourself?'

Judy set her teeth.

'Immensely.'

He raised her hand to his lips, but the homage of that caress was completely spoiled by the mockery in his eyes.

'*Au revoir*, little comforter.'

She wrenched away her hand. Her large dark eyes were stormy with unshed tears, and her lips trembling as she walked into the hotel and took the lift up to her bedroom.

The whole situation was tragic, comic, a dozen things at once. She only knew that she loved Maurice with every drop of blood in her body, and that it was sheer torment to her to be held by him thus lightly. How could she go on with it? Yet there was no drawing back for her now. She had pledged herself to make him forget his part of the tragedy, and Judy, being Judy, carried on. Generosity—impulsiveness—her besetting faults were swaying her now.

The tears dried on her lashes when she reached her room. She ceased to worry or grieve. She even borrowed a little of Maurice's recklessness—that spirit borne of bitter pain which makes one say: 'What does anything matter?'

She was going to spend the rest of this evening with him, so she must look nice—yes, nicer than she had ever looked—for him.

A little feverishly Judy bathed, and then put on all her loveliest things. The pale yellow silk cami-knickers she had made for herself, embroidered during the winter evenings at Selsey. Sheer silk stockings—small satin shoes. A straight silk slip which fitted her slim, curving body like a sheath, and then the chiffon frock which had a little coat to match. The frock was delicately lovely; palest shade of amber, with little gold flowers printed on it. It suited Judy's dark gipsy colouring. Kink had always liked her in this dress. Dear old Kink. Her heart smote her at the memory of him, but swiftly she blotted it out. Better not to think about Kink or any of them down at Grey Chesters *now*.

Judy never used make-up, but she was satisfied, when she gazed in her mirror this evening, that she looked her best.

Excitement had brought an added colour to her cheeks; an almost unnatural brilliance to her big brown eyes; and the one big wave of hair, pushing back from her forehead, rippled like dark bronze.

Would Maurice think that she was pretty? He had said so quite often to-day. But did he really think it? She was such a little gipsy, and his love was all for Carol—Carol, who was the antithesis of herself—fair and delicate as a tall lily.

Judy felt that she hated her cousin Carol to-night.

'If she had only believed me when I told her the truth, she would have been with Maurice now and this tragedy would never have happened,' Judy thought.

But the memory of Carol must be speedily blotted out, too. With a deliberate little gesture—with the feeling that she was defying the whole world to-night—Judy slipped into her black velvet evening coat, seized her one and only decent evening bag, and walked out into the vestibule, where she found Maurice already waiting for her.

CHAPTER 9

THE strange evening continued.

Once again when Judy was with Maurice she had that feeling that the whole thing was unreal, and that it could only end in disaster. But, when she rejoined him, he was in as excitable and reckless a mood as he had been before they separated. As soon as he saw her he told her that she looked charming, and presented her with a shoulder spray of deep mauve orchids which he assured her put the finishing-touch to a delightful toilette.

She pinned the delicate, wicked-looking flowers on her shoulder as they drove to *Chez Monseigneur*, where Maurice had ordered dinner. Her excitement ran riot with his. He was in a mad mood. So was she. She no longer worried about the family at Grey Chesters or the peculiar circumstances under which she was here with Maurice. He seemed to have put from him every thought save that of the present—the desire to enjoy himself extravagantly. She must take her cue from him.

The fog was lifting in the queer, rapid fashion of London fogs, and, as they drove from Victoria to the West End, Maurice looked at the lights, the traffic, the crowds, his eyes shining in his thin, tired face.

'This is the sort of thing a man dreams about when he's out East, and particularly in the sort of position I was—wondering if I'd ever live to see London again.'

'It is rather thrilling,' said Judy. 'I've never been out quite like this before.'

He turned to her, smiling, and with nervous fingers lit a cigarette.

'Do you know your Rupert Brooke—"My night shall be remembered for a star that outshone all the suns of all men's days"?'

She met his gaze, cheeks flushing, heart-beats quickening.

'Yes, I know that. I love Rupert Brooke.'

'We'll make it a good night, my child. We'll forget all the futilities, the foolishness of the things life makes us do.'

'Yes,' she said in a low voice. But the colour ebbed from her cheeks again.

Maurice seemed to her like a man burnt up by some inner fire—consumed by it—seeking release from the torture of his pain. She understood. She knew that the thought of Carol, bitter hunger for her and for his broken dreams, lay at the back of his fever. She was filled with anguish for him because she held herself guilty. But she dared not open the subject. She made neither protests nor apologies. And when he put an arm about her shoulders, and she felt his hand warm against her bare arm, she sat still and shut her eyes. If only she did not love this man whom she had hurt so much it would have made everything easier to-night.

She longed to cry out:

'Stop, Maurice—let me go—let's never see each other again. I've wronged you. You hate me. This is all no use—and to-morrow you'll wake up and you won't want to be kind to me—you won't want me to be kind to you! It's all so mad!'

Yet with the madness there was a crazy kind of happiness, too.

In the attractive, dim restaurant of *Chez Monseigneur* they had a marvellous dinner. Maurice seemed to delight in ordering the most *recherché* meal; from the caviare to the meringue glacé it was perfect. And of course he made Judy drink champagne, and drank a lot himself.

He was in a talkative mood, and told her a lot about Cambridge—that loveliest of towns, associated for ever with the poet whom he had just quoted. Cambridge—and Grantchester. Maurice had been up at Clare College. He did not mention Carol's name, but he said:

'I meant to have my honeymoon there—I can think of nothing lovelier than being with somebody one loved at Grantchester; and showing them Clare—my college. You can stand on Clare Bridge and look down into the river, dappled with sunlight, at the willows—the flowers in the quadrangles —the peace, the beauty of the Fellows' gardens—and it's like paradise.' Maurice's face was the rapt face of a boy again as he launched into a description of his beloved college. He had been happy at Cambridge.

Judy listened, hanging on every word, visualising each place that he spoke of, loving the thought of it all. But her heart ached for him. He had dreamed of taking Carol there. That was lying underneath the subject. Unhappy Maurice! All this conversation seemed to flow from him as though he had stored it up for Carol. It must come out after the repression and horror of the last few months. And Judy became the receptacle into which he poured his emotions, ambitions, opinions, and desires. She looked at him to-night and realised that she had never known him before—but that she knew him now, intimately. She was like an instrument upon which he played. But he played with careless fingers. Of her—her inner life, her hopes and visions—he knew nothing, and did not seek to find out.

The dinner over, his mood changed again. He swung from the romance of Cambridge, and the past, to the feverish gaiety of the moment.

They sat through a musical comedy, and there again it was Maurice and not Judy who did all the talking, all the enjoying. She was like one too dazed to do more than passively share in the pleasures of this strange night.

She began to feel tired. Her eyelids were weighted, and some of her vidid colouring faded. It had been a long, trying

day, and she felt the sudden desire to be alone—to sleep and forget everything. But Maurice was not going to let her forget. For him the evening had not yet ended.

'Don't go back to the Eccleston yet, Judy,' he said after the theatre. 'Come up to my flat. We can get a drink and some sandwiches there. I'm only just waking up. If you go back, everything will fall flat. You've been a marvellous companion.'

That made her smile a little sadly. A 'marvellous companion,' because she looked presentable and was a good and sympathetic listener. She had fallen in with all his wishes so readily that there had not been a jarring note. But she remembered with some bitterness that he had never been like this—the complete egotist, the selfish male—with Carol. It had been he who had danced to Carol's tune. But then, of course, he had loved Caro, and a man will dance to the tune of the woman he loves. Judy knew it was futile for her—the woman he did not love—to make the comparison.

She did not want to go back to his flat. His was always a dominant personality; it devastated her to-day. She felt as though to-night he was pulling her out of her depth—submerging her—drowning her. She was afraid of the very force and strength of him.

'I'd better go straight to the hotel,' she said.

But Maurice was stubborn.

'Just half an hour with me—some sandwiches—a talk——'

'I ought to talk about the work I mean to find,' she said helplessly.

'Work!' He laughed and jeered. 'Who cares about work? The fog's lifting. The stars are coming out. I'm back in London again, and you've got the longest eyelashes I've ever seen. My God, who wants to talk about work?'

'Where's all this leading——' she began.

'Come, little comforter,' he teased her, still in his crazy mood. 'You're not going to let me down at the last moment!'

She caught her lower lip between her teeth, and her eyes widened.

'What do you want me to do?'

'Just be sweet to me. You really are rather sweet, Judy. Kiss me, dear.'

She wanted to cry out 'No,' but no words came. She was in his arms, and, with a devastating sense of grief, of hopelessness, she knew that his embrace meant life and death—bitterness and ecstasy—all things combined to wreck her.

It was a more passionate embrace than any of the others to-day, and lasted longer. She was shivering from head to foot when he let her go. The taxi drew up with a jerk outside St. John's Court. Maurice himself had grown suddenly serious, and his eyes had darkened with excitement. He knew perfectly well that he was in a dangerous state—that he had been letting himself go most of the evening. But he did not mean to let control go altogether. He had no deliberate intention of hurting Judy. She was young, helpless; curiously sweet to touch and kiss. Rather tragic in her remorse for the wrong she had done him—over-generous in her effort to make amends. His violent rage against her had subsided. He had tried to forget why they were here in London together, and to remember only that she was a charming companion and a very attractive girl.

He half regretted taking her to Lister's flat once he got her there. She looked so small and pale and frightened when he took the black velvet cloak gently from her shoulders, and a single standard lamp threw its dim light upon the pretty figure in the pale yellow chiffon gown.

How big and dark her eyes were—like the eyes of a hurt and perplexed child—perplexed as to what next life would do to her.

'Don't look at me like that, Judy,' he said; then, with a short laugh, turned from her and poured himself out a whisky and soda.

'I must get back to my hotel,' she said in a low voice.

'My dear child, you've only just come up to the flat.'

'I'm tired, Maurice.'

'You've all the morning for sleep,' he said with another

laugh. He put down his glass and came and sat on the end of her chair and played with her hair.

'Your orchids are crushed—they looked charming on your shoulder.'

She did not answer. He felt her trembling.

'Are you scared of me, Judy?'

'I think I'm scared of everything,' she whispered. 'It's all so—so amazing—so queer.'

'That's how I felt about things when I arrived at Grey Chesters and heard what you had done, and how Carol had failed me—it was amazing and queer!'

It was the first time this evening that he had let Carol's name pass his lips. Judy looked up at him dumbly.

'Hadn't I better go? What's the use of my staying?'

He stood up and jerked the stiff white collar away from his neck. She thought how brown the flesh looked against the whiteness of that collar and stiff shirt-front; how lithe and well-built he was—a man who looked well in 'tails.' He was really very good to look at, in spite of his scarred face.

'Hadn't I better go?' she repeated.

'Oh, very well, go if you want,' he said with sudden violence. 'I don't care a damn. You're quite right. What's the use?'

And, after that, reaction. An agonising sense of loss, of loneliness, defeated the man, and made him realise how in vain had been that reckless pursuit of gaiety in Judy's company to-night.

'God!' he said thickly, sat down on the Chesterfield, which was at right angles to the fire, and put his head between his hands. 'Why did this ghastly thing happen? Why didn't Caro believe in me?'

Something seemed to break in Judy, too. She went to Maurice, dropped on one knee beside him, put her arms about his waist, and leaned her head on his lap.

'Maurice! Oh, Maurice, *Maurice*! I'd give my life to go back and wipe it all out—I'd give anything not to have hurt you like this!'

He rocked himself to and fro without lifting his head.

'Oh, it's too late now. The harm's done. Go home, Judy. What's the use of anything? It's too late now. The thing's unbearable at the moment, but no doubt I'll get over it in time. Don't cry. I know you didn't mean it—yes, I'm sure you acted for the best. I believe you. For God's sake don't cry like that.'

But her body was torn with sobs now. She went on crying desperately. He, with his nerves, his emotions, as strained as hers, lost control. He picked her up in his arms, pulled her against him, and covered her wet face with kisses.

'I won't let you cry—and I won't let you go,' he said thickly. 'Stay here—like this—just you and I together. We'll make each other forget this damnable show. You're so sweet to hold and kiss, my dear. I may be crazy—quite crazy. But you can help me this way—if you want to.'

She ceased weeping, and lay dumb and quiescent in his arms. He held her for a moment of almost desperate passion. She felt his lips stray across her face—seal her eyelids.

'Don't leave me,' he kept saying. 'I want you. Darling Judy—you're trembling. Would you like to stay with me?'

But she could not answer. She could only press close against him, one arm curved above his neck. She thought:

'This had to happen—I knew it would happen. He isn't normal—he's just off his head with misery, and he wants to forget Carol. I love him—I worship him—I'll do anything in the world—if only I can make him happy again.'

His lips were hungry and urgent against her mouth. She had an instant of panic—of feeling:

'I mustn't let it happen—it's such a terrific thing—and tomorrow, when he's sane, he'll hate me!'

'You're sweet enough to turn any man's head, you little Judy,' came his husky voice against her ear.

She strained away from him, her eyes dark and enormous in her white young face.

'Maurice—what are we doing? Wait—think——'

'No,' he said, 'I don't want to think. I only want to hold

you and kiss you. You've got the most enchanting eyelashes, and I like your little bobbed head.'

His fingers threaded through her hair. He smiled down at her queerly. Even now there was a tragic quality in his passion which pulled at her heart-strings, defeated her wish to restore him to sanity.

He had been through hell—Carol's love and comfort had been taken from him. She, Judy, must deny him nothing. Her very body seemed to ache with love for him.

'That story has got to come true, Judy,' he said. 'There's no drawing back now. That night we had together—*she* believed it—then, my God! let's give her something to believe!'

'Maurice—please——'

'I can't let you go now. I'm too damn miserable, and so are you. Do you like me a little? Were you speaking the truth when you told her that you cared for me?'

'You've no right to ask me.'

'No right to do anything,' he said with a fierce intake of his breath. 'But let the world go by, so far as we are concerned. We're in this *débâcle* together. Come closer, darling.' And he quoted huskily those words that he had said to her earlier this evening: ' "My night shall be remembered for a star." We'll make it a star, darling—like this——'

He put up a hand and switched off the lamp which stood at the back of the Chesterfield. The room was plunged in darkness.

After that Judy didn't care what happened.

CHAPTER 10

YOUNG Charles Riverson, otherwise Kink, came down to breakfast at Grey Chesters, that morning, in a bad temper—an unusual thing for him, because his nature was an exceedingly amiable one. Colonel and Mrs. Riverson, with the Spartan spirit of the last generation, were always up and present at this early meal. But Carol did not appear.

Kink began breakfast in moody silence. Mrs. Riverson, whose expression conveyed that she was in the right and everybody else in the wrong, busied herself pouring out the coffee. The Colonel buried himself behind *The Times*.

At length Kink put down his knife and fork, pushed back his chair, and said what was on his mind:

'Look here, I've got to get to Town, but before I go I want to tell you both that I think something ought to be done about Judy.'

His mother's face immediately froze. Colonel Riverson looked at his son over the rim of his paper.

'About Judy?' he repeated. 'In what way, Kink?'

'There's nothing whatsoever to be done about Judy,' said Mrs. Riverson. 'She's made her own bed and she must lie on it.'

Kink loved his mother, but he loathed that type of remark. His fair face flushed resentfully.

'Mother, you're not being sporting.'

'Really, Kink!' she broke in angrily. 'It isn't a question of being sporting. Judy did a terrible thing, and——'

Then Kink lost his temper and crashed his fist down on the table.

'She did nothing of the sort! You and Carol—all of you—my God! it's iniquitous—too damn silly for words—to believe in that absurd story! Wasn't it obvious she made it up to try and save Carol that night?'

Mrs. Riverson rose grandly.

'How *dare* you speak to me like that, Kink?'

The Colonel flung his *Times* on the floor.

'I won't have this sort of row going on in the house. We never have had dissension here, and I won't allow it now.'

'Judy's responsible for it,' said Mrs. Riverson, her bosom heaving. 'She's caused all the trouble.'

'And saved Carol from going mad,' Kink reminded her. 'You're all forgetting that.'

'Now, look here,' exclaimed the Colonel. 'There's no need to quarrel. Surely Judy can be discussed without all this—this sort of business!' He waved a hand round the room. 'Vi, my dear, the boy's right. Something ought to be done about Judy.'

'*I* said good-bye to Judy for good and all when she left this house,' said Mrs. Riverson icily, 'but she's your niece and not mine, Charles, so whatever you wish to do you must decide upon without me. As for Kink—if he has anything more to do with her, it will be deliberately siding against his own mother.'

Kink thrust his hands in his pockets and began to pace the dining-room. He had known his mother to be unreasonable, but never before quite as hard, as difficult as this. He realised that she had never really been fond of Judy. He was greatly depressed by the thought.

He himself had missed Judy horribly yesterday. Grey Chesters had seemed flat and all wrong without her, as though something in the home was missing that ought to be there. Judy had been one of them for so many years. It had

hurt him badly when she had driven away early that morning and refused to see him again. He had had very little sleep last night, worrying about her, wondering where she had gone and what she meant to do. He knew that his father was worrying, too.

As for Carol, he had had his first real quarrel with his twin sister, yesterday, on the subject of Judy. He had argued with her for hours on end—trying to make her realise the truth about that ridiculous story which Judy had told her. Carol had remained exasperatingly indifferent to his arguments. Only once had she shown any human interest in Judy's welfare, and then, just before she went to bed, she had said to him:

'I hope Judy will be all right.'

Mrs. Riverson swept out of the dining-room and left her husband and son alone together. Kink regarded his father gloomily.

'Dad, you feel just as I do about Judy, don't you?'

The Colonel's bushy eyebrows met.

'Yes, yes, of course. I—I'm worried about her, my dear boy. I'm very fond of Judy. She's my own kith and kin. Naturally your mother doesn't feel quite the same. Your mother's a very upright woman, Kink, and she would find it hard to condone such a thing as this—this affair between Judy and young Fairvill.'

'You know as well as I do, Dad, that Judy only invented that story.'

'I'm inclined to think you're right. Judy wasn't the sort of girl to do a thing like that behind our backs—and with Carol's *fiancé*, too.'

'Maurice wasn't that sort either,' said Kink.

'It's all most worrying—*most* worrying,' said the Colonel, and coughed and cleared his throat. 'I wish the child hadn't rushed off like that without leaving any address. When you're up in Town, Kink, you might try and find out where she's gone.'

'It's more than likely that Maurice will know. Or her

friends the Graynes. I can find out their phone number and get on to them. And, if she isn't there, I'll have a shot at Maurice's office. I have a sort of feeling he'll know where she is.'

'Well, let me know as soon as you find out. I've got to see that the child's financially secure. Don't worry about your mother's attitude; she'll come round in a day or two.'

'Carol's jolly well got to come round too,' said Kink fiercely, 'or she won't see much of me in the future.'

'My dear boy,' said the Colonel sadly, 'I don't like to hear that. You two have been so inseparable——'

'Caro's my twin,' said Kink, 'and I'm devoted to her. But I'm devoted to Judy, too, and she's been a perfect dear to us. We can't kick her out like this and refuse to believe a word she says. How *can* we?'

'It's all very unfortunate,' said the Colonel, 'and, if the child did invent the story, I must say it was a confoundedly silly thing to do.'

'One of Judy's impulses,' said Kink. 'She was always too generous—too ready to do any mortal thing for Caro —for all of us!'

He turned, walked out of the dining-room, and went up to his sister's bedroom.

'Can I come in and say good-bye, Caro?'

'Of course, darling. Come in.'

He stood beside her bed and looked down at her in unhappy silence for a moment. The delicate, attractive face, with the lustrous blue eyes so like his own, looked up at him from the pillows charmingly. Her greeting was friendly and affectionate. He was perplexed, as he had been ever since the disastrous affair about Maurice, that his sister, who was so adorable when she wanted to be, so gentle, so sweet, had that hard, ungenerous streak in her.

'Caro,' he said, 'before I go back to hospital I want to talk to you about Judy.'

Carol sighed and pushed a strand of golden hair back from her forehead.

'Haven't we talked enough about Judy?'

He sat on the edge of her bed.

'Be reasonable, old girl. Don't go all "blah" about this show, like the mater's done. It isn't worthy of you. Dad and I see things reasonably. You must, too. You'll admit yesterday was a day of menace and gloom. None of us enjoyed it. We all felt, underneath, that Judy had been treated very shabbily. My dear, she would have done any mortal thing for you, and, as I told you yesterday, I *know* that she only invented that preposterous tale about Maurice to try and save you from tragedy.'

Carol bit her lip.

'It's all very difficult to credit.'

'I know that, but can't you see that it couldn't be true?' said Kink eagerly. 'Judy wasn't like that, and neither was Maurice.'

An expression of pain crossed Carol's beautiful face.

'I don't know what to think. I admit I've been worrying about it ever since Maurice and Judy went away. I know they've both denied it.' She paused and spread out her white, slender fingers. 'But why in heaven's name did Judy ever start the business? She would have done much better to have left me alone—and let me go on grieving for Maurice. Don't you see what happened to me? After her story, and the reaction, I just felt I didn't care a bit about Maurice any more, and then up in Town with you, when I met Dr. Maddison——'

'Oh, I know,' broke in her twin. 'It's the very devil. I see quite well how it affected you. Maddison's an attractive fellow, and a very clever one. I can quite see that he sort of won you on the rebound. But it's pretty awful for Maurice. My God! what a reception we gave the poor fellow! And he must have had the hell of a time in China. Caro, old girl, you can't have forgotten how much you cared for him.'

Carol's long fair lashes hid the expression in her eyes. Her fingers plucked nervously at the swansdown on her bed-jacket.

'I've wanted to forget him—and in a way I've succeeded. I could never share a lover with any other woman.'

'Maurice Fairvill was never Judy's lover, anyhow,' said Kink definitely. 'That I can promise you. And look here, my dear, it won't be playing the game if you see any more of Maddison until you've given Maurice another chance—heard his story and Judy's as well. I know you were a bit crazy the other night—we were all rather unnerved by the shock of seeing Maurice again, when we thought he was dead. And, of course, Judy made her story very conclusive. But I want you to come up to Town to-day and see Maurice and give him a chance.'

Carol was silent for a moment. She felt unsettled and aggrieved by the whole affair. Of course, she *had* been passionately in love with Maurice. But she was rather in love with Maddison now. It was all very difficult.

'I shall see Maddison at the hospital,' added Kink, 'and tell him the whole story. I think it's only fair to him. He's straight as a die, that chap. No matter how much he wanted to marry you, he'd back out at once if he thought you were pledged to Maurice. And when he hears that Maurice is not dead, and I explain this rotten business, he'll understand.'

Carol sat up, her cheeks crimson, her eyes frightened.

'Kink—you can't tell him—you mustn't! He won't see me any more——'

'I've got to tell him, Caro, and you know jolly well that I'd be wrong if I didn't.'

'It isn't your business!' she began.

'You're my sister, Caro, and he's my pal. For God's sake don't be a little beast over this show. It will hurt me frightfully if you don't see reason and give Maurice another chance—and Judy, too.'

Carol lay back on her pillows and put a hand to her eyes.

'Oh—it isn't fair—to be harried like this—have my feelings torn first one way then another—I really *shall* go crazy soon.'

Kink leant forward and patted her shoulder.

'It's certainly hard on you, darling, but pull yourself together and face it. You must consider Judy and Maurice as well as yourself and Maddison.'

'You mean I've *got* to see Maurice?' she said in a stifled voice.

'Don't you think you ought to?'

'I suppose so.'

'Caro, dear, you were crazy about him in the old days. Surely it will all revive once you two understand each other.'

Carol kept her hands pressed against her eyelids.

'Perhaps. I can't explain, but something just died in me when Judy told me that story, and now it'll be hard for me ever to feel the same. And there's Grant——'

Kink got up and began to pace round the bedroom.

'Yes, it's the devil of a fix. But one must play fair. If you do anything mean or cowardly, you'll hate yourself for it.'

'Life seems a ghastly muddle,' said Carol, and burst into tears.

He came over to her and put both arms around her slight, quivering shoulders.

'Don't, darling. I hate you to cry. Buck up and do your best, anyhow. It's unthinkable that Judy should be turned out of this house and accused of something she's never done. And damned unfair if Maurice loses you without deserving it.'

'I suppose I'd better see him,' said Carol sullenly.

'And Judy must be found, too.'

'Anybody'd think you were in love with Judy.'

Kirk winced, drew away from his sister, pulled out a pipe and stuck it between his teeth.

'Perhaps I am. But that's got to be washed out, hasn't it? You see, we've all got something to face, old girl.'

Carol put a handkerchief to her lips and looked at him, her eyes glittering with tears.

'Kink, I'll see Maurice and give him a fair hearing, and

Judy too. I promise. But please don't say anything to Grant yet.'

'Very well, if you wish it.'

Later, when he had gone, Carol lay in bed brooding over the affair. She remembered, uneasily, how madly she had loved Maurice. Was it possible that he had been faithful, and that Judy really had concocted the whole dreadful story? If so, she, Carol, would certainly have no right to look at any other man on earth while Maurice was alive. But unfortunately there was Grant. And at that dance in Town, the other night, she had been considerably stirred by the attractive doctor whom Kink said was the most brilliant surgeon in England.

Even if she was forced to renew her faith in Maurice, could things ever be the same between them again? Kink said that Maddison would not dream of renewing his proposal of marriage once he knew about Maurice. That frightened her. She didn't want to lose Grant. Well, the only thing to do now was to see Maurice first and Grant afterwards.

CHAPTER 11

WHEN Judy woke up that morning, it took her some time to realise where she was and what had happened to her.

At first she thought that she was in her own little bedroom at Grey Chesters. And then, as her eyes, heavy with sleep, gradually opened, she became aware that she was in an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar room. This certainly wasn't Selsey. Beyond the window was no quiet garden, no vista of sea. She could hear all sorts of stray noises: traffic—taxis rolling down the street, horns blaring, buses thundering in the distance.

She knew now. This was London. Oh, heavens, and this was St. John's Court and Maurice's flat—the flat lent to him by his friend Jack Lister.

Now she remembered everything, and for a moment Judy lay like one paralysed, scorching colour rushing across her face and throat. Then she sprang out of bed and pushed back the curtains. The grey, depressing light of a misty winter's morning filtered into the room; a narrow room, rather austere and essentially masculine. Brown carpet, brown curtains, a dressing-chest, wardrobe, fitted basin in the corner. She turned to the mirror and saw herself, a queer, unfamiliar spectacle in white silk pyjamas much too big for her. Maurice had lent her those pyjamas—heavy silk things brought back from China. And the dressing-gown at the foot of the bed, dark blue silk—that, too, was Maurice's. She

remembered him wrapping it round her and carrying her in here to bed.

'You can't go back to the hotel at 5 a.m.,' he had told her.

A sick, frightened feeling stole over Judy as she stood there, shivering, in the centre of the cold room.

It all seemed incredible now. Like a fantastic dream. The whole of yesterday had been a dream, but last night—that had been something more. Passionate reality. How strange, how bewildering, the thought that Maurice, who had been her judge, her accuser when yesterday commenced, ended that day as her lover.

Her lover! Judy trembled from head to foot and hid her face in her hands. She had not known that love could be so fiercely sweet. It ought never to have been—he had been crazy, and she had made little effort to stem the tide of his madness.

It had been her way of making amends. But now, what would the consequences be? She felt incapable of facing him in the deadly, searching light of the morning. She felt so certain that he would regret and loathe her. But she knew that, even though she regretted last night, she could never do anything but love him to the end of her life.

' "My night shall be remembered for a star," ' he had said. For Judy it had been a star that would indeed outshine. 'All the suns of all men's days.' But he had loved Carol, and just taken her, Judy, because circumstances had thrown them together, and he had wanted all that she had to give. She had given generously, which was her way. But the knowledge that he had not really loved her had been like a knife entering her heart throughout the blinding sweetness of that night.

Somebody knocked on the door. Judy rushed for the dressing-gown and wrapped it round her, her small toes tangled in the absurdly long silk pyjama-legs.

Maurice's voice, very curt, very formal:

'Would you like breakfast in bed?'

'No!' she said in a panic-stricken way. 'I'll dress and come out, but, Maurice——'

'If you're worrying about luggage, here it is,' he said, and she heard something heavy being put down outside the door. 'I went round to the Eccleston early,' he told her. 'I knew you'd want some clothes. I settled the bill and asked the chambermaid to pack your things.'

Judy stared dumbly at the door. It was very tactful of him to have fetched her clothes. She certainly did not want to get into evening-dress this morning. That would have been the last straw. She wondered what on earth they thought at the hotel. Well, it didn't seem to matter now what anybody thought.

Maurice's voice sounded terribly cold. She told herself miserably that she must expect that. She wished she hadn't got to see him. She felt she could put up with anything but the agony of being held lightly by him, looked at with contempt. But, of course, it was her own fault. She was not going to blame him. She never would.

Later, bathed, and dressed in the tweeds of yesterday, Judy walked into the sitting room and found Maurice just finishing breakfast.

He sat at the table glancing at a newspaper. He put it down as soon as she entered and rose politely to his feet. A rather studied politeness, she felt. She nerved herself to look at him. When their eyes met, her heart gave a terrific leap. He seemed undisturbed. His thin brown face looked paler than usual in the grey morning light, and the scar on his cheek showed up angrily.

'You must forgive me for having started without you,' he said, 'but I've been up some time, and I was hungry after walking round to the hotel to get your things.'

Her lashes drooped. She flushed hotly, grew white again, crossed to a chair and sat in it.

'That's quite all right,' she said. And thought what an absurd conversation it was—after last night. With an unsteady hand she poured herself out some coffee.

'Do you mind if I smoke?' said Maurice.

'Not at all,' said Judy.

He lit a cigarette. She did not look up at him. She tried to concentrate on her breakfast, but Maurice looked down at her—a long searching scrutiny of which she was quite unaware. And she was equally unaware of the storm of conflicting emotions seething in Maurice under the mask of cold formality.

If ever a man was smitten with real remorse, it was Maurice. It was inevitable that he should reach this stage this morning. The madness of last night had passed, and it had left him deeply ashamed. Judy had wronged him. But now he had done her a greater wrong. And, strangely enough, running parallel with his remorse was a very real regard for her.

The pendulum might so easily have swung the other way. He might have despised Judy. But Maurice Fairvill was a human, discerning man, and with unerring instinct he knew that her surrender had been in no ways a wanton one. He knew her too well; had heard so much about her in the old days, even though he had never been intimately concerned with her. But he did understand a little about the big impulses that were part of Judy's generous nature. He was firmly convinced that she had stayed with him last night because he had needed her and she had thought that it was the one way in which she could best pay her debt to him.

He had never meant it to happen. But the whole sequence of events, beginning from Carol's rejection of him, had led up to the mad conclusion. Judy had been sweet—much too sweet. He did not quite understand why her surrender had been so absolute, and not for an instant did he presume that she was in love with him.

The grey wintry dawn had found him awake, smoking, brooding over the thought of Judy; a little bewildered by the memory of so much sweetness. He was in love with another woman, yet he had found life strangely thrilling in the rôle of Judy's lover. Her tenderness had been a revelation to him. And the queerest thing of all was the fact that not once had he held her in contempt, although of himself he was contemp-

tous and this morning he was both confused and unhappy and—like most men—anxious to hide emotion.

But after a moment, when he watched her struggling with her food, only to put down knife and fork and leave the meal uneaten; and saw the droop of the little dark head; he felt impelled to thaw the ice between them.

He came up to the back of her chair and put an arm around her shoulders.

'Aren't you going to make a better breakfast than that?'

Judy sat very still. The touch of his arm was agony and delight. She did not know what he felt about her—could not guess—but she was well aware of her own absorbing love for him. Last night had made her so absolutely his—she felt that she belonged to him for ever, that there never could be anybody else. Possession might mean little to him—at any rate she was under no illusions about his feelings for her. She had the desperate inclination to turn and hide her face against his shoulder and to hold on to him very tightly. But she did nothing of the kind. An agonised shyness mingled with her embarrassment.

'Have something more to eat, Judy,' he persisted.

'No, thanks—I've had enough—I don't want any more.' She pushed back her chair and moved away from him. She could not bear the contact with him. She was so afraid of breaking down.

She crossed to the window and stood looking down at the little bay-trees in their green tubs which stood in the court-yard around which St. John's Court flats were built.

A woman in a fur coat came out of one of the flats and stepped into a big Daimler car. The car moved off. A taxi rolled up and deposited a man outside another entrance to the west side of the court.

Judy pressed her hands tightly together in front of her. Her eyelids felt tight and hot. Life was going on—everyday life. This block of flats was like a little world full of people who did not know each other and might never meet; and they all had their own personal troubles and sorrows and delights.

She wondered if anything more strange had happened to any of these people than had been her fate in Jack Lister's flat last night. She wondered how she was going to bear carrying on without Maurice. But of course she must. In a very few minutes she must go away, and she would never see Maurice again.

Then she felt his hand on her arm, pulling her gently round to him. He forced her to turn and face him. She felt curiously panic-stricken when she looked at him, and yet she found no trace of the scorn or bitterness in that thin brown face, which she expected to see. His expression was surprisingly soft—even shy. It seemed queer to her that Maurice, the experienced man of travel, should have that boyish timidity in his eyes.

He said:

'Judy, my dear, we must have a talk about things. Although I don't know what the devil I'm going to say to you.'

'Nothing. What is there to say? I don't want you to say anything,' she stammered wildly.

'But of course:' His protest was gentle, and there was a complete lack of animosity in his attitude which was an astonishment as well as a relief to Judy. 'Come and sit down, and let's face things,' he added, and drew her to the Chesterfield.

A host of memories shook her as she sat beside him. Suddenly the hot colour scorched her face and she put the back of her hand against her eyes, as though to hide them from him. The sight of her there, so ashamed, so helpless, so forlorn, deepened the man's remorse and stirred him to new tenderness for her.

He put an arm around her, leaned down and kissed her hair.

'Poor child. I ought to be shot—I was off my head. How am I going to ask for forgiveness? I don't deserve it.'

She buried her face in her hands now. She felt that all the ecstasy of loving this man was wiped out by the bitter knowledge that he did not care for her. He was worried by what he

had done—sorry for her. But that only hurt her. She did not want to be the object of his pity. She would rather that he caught her close to his heart and shared with her the rapture of remembering.

He kissed her hair again.

'You were so sweet, and I was an unpardonable cad. No matter what you did—I had no right——'

'Oh, stop, *please*!' broke from Judy's quivering lips. 'I don't want you to feel like that about it. You've no need to be ashamed.'

'God, yes, I have,' he said in an undertone.

'No! I'm not a child. I'm old enough to know my own mind—and I realised what I was doing when I stayed here last night.'

'Judy—oh, you little fool!' He spoke almost angrily, although his arm tightened about her. 'You shouldn't be so generous. I deserve to be kicked, and you're the one who ought to be kicking me.'

It was on the tip of her tongue to cry out:

'No—I love you! I don't regret it, because I love you!'

But she wasn't going to tell him that. She must gather together the remnants of pride and fashion from them a flag to cover her agony of unrequited loving.

'Please let go of me,' she said under her breath.

Immediately he drew away from her.

'Do you hate the sight of me, Judy? I expect you do.'

'No—I don't——'

'You ought to. I can only say that I was half off my head—but that doesn't excuse me.'

'I don't want you to excuse yourself. We understand each other. I was crazy, too.'

'Crazy to be quite so generous in your efforts to help me over a bad patch,' he reproached her gently.

'I made the bad patch,' she said in a stifled voice.

His straight, dark brows drew together.

'We won't talk about that; it's all a nightmare. I wish to God we could wake up and find it wasn't any of it true.'

He was thinking of Carol, but Judy thought that it was mainly last night that he would like to find untrue. He was being quite kind and understanding, yet it was so very obvious that she meant nothing to him—nothing at all.

Then suddenly he turned to her and took both her hands in his and looked her straight in the eyes.

'Judy,' he said quietly, 'I want you to marry me.'

Her large brown eyes, with startled enquiry in their depths, returned his gaze for an instant. Then the sensitive colour mounted to her cheeks and her lips parted. She gave a short, nervous laugh, and drew her fingers away from his.

'Oh—no—that's ridiculous, of course!'

'It isn't ridiculousl, Judy. It's a serious fact. I want you to marry me.'

'Marry you? *Me?* You mean—because of last night?' broke from her breathlessly. Then she laughed again and shook her head. 'No, no, definitely not. It's out of the question.'

A moment's silence. Maurice stared at the ground. He knew perfectly well that he was asking her to marry him because of last night—in all honesty he had to admit that. After all, it was Carol he had loved and wanted to marry, all those months. He could not change his feelings in a day or a night, just because Carol had failed him and Judy had been sweet—adorably so—in his arms last night. For many inexplicable reasons he liked Judy a lot better this morning than he had ever liked her in his life. And, of course, she was bound to him now by a very definite tie. He could never possibly put her out of his life or forget her, even if he wanted to. But confess to sudden love, or tell her that his proposal rose from motives of love only, he could not. The lie would be too deliberate.

'Look here, Judy,' he said after a long pause, 'let's try and understand each other?'

'What's the use of talking?' she broke in. 'It's frightfully nice of you——' The word 'nice' stuck in her throat. 'Wonderful of you, in fact, to ask me to marry you. But

there's no need, I assure you. I wouldn't dream of accepting such a—a sacrifice—just because of last night.'

It was Maurice's turn to redden now. He gave her a swift look, then busied himself lighting a cigarette.

'It isn't a question of sacrifice. Curiously enough, I don't feel I should be unhappy married to you.'

That made her eyes sting with tears, but she said wildly:

'Oh, that's absurd, Maurice! I've done you the greatest wrong anybody could do. You must still resent it bitterly, and will resent it all your life. It's Carol you wanted to marry, and Carol you still care for. You can't deny that. I'm not going to accept your proposal, anyhow. I couldn't *bear* to marry you under such conditions.'

Maurice, his cigarette lit, stood up and moved away from the couch.

'Of course, I quite realise that you may not want to marry me—I don't know that I am a particularly pleasant fellow, and I've been singularly unpleasant to you.'

Judy looked after the tall, lithe figure, her small gipsy face contracting with pain. If only he knew how much she cared and how much she wanted him! But not for worlds could she have borne to accept Maurice's proposal of marriage, knowing that he had made it only from a sense of duty and shame. Why, the thing was ridiculous! Before he had been married to her a few days he would be hating the sight of her—feeling that he had been forced into it by the most unfortunate circumstances. She wasn't going to risk that—no, she would far rather never see him again.

Before she could speak again, he turned to her. Those very blue eyes of his had hardened again, and his voice was quite cold.

'I quite understand it if you don't wish to marry me, Judy. Why should you? But I think that we ought to get married – I'd like you to consider it very seriously—and I'll do anything in my power to make you happy, if you'll fix things up.'

Judy stood up, pulled her woolly jumper firmly down over

her hips, and straightened her belt. Her voice had a coldness to match his when she spoke again.

'I shan't marry you, Maurice. Thanks—awfully. But you need not let last night make any difference to your life. I won't allow it to make any difference to mine.' She added the lie bravely.

He looked at her in a worried way. It seemed strange and difficult to believe that this slim, pretty child, who looked at him so proudly, so distantly, this morning, had lain in his arms last night, swayed by the most overwhelming passion—a passion to equal his. A queer, passionate, impulsive creature, this Judy. There was something extraordinarily lovable about her—something that won his respect. He felt uneasy about her. He knew that she had nobody else to look after her, now that the Riversons had turned her out. He was responsible for her—yes, he wasn't going to shirk that responsibility either. He didn't want to. Neither did he wish there to be any further animosity between them.

'Hadn't you better marry me, Judy?' he said more gently.

'No,' she said under her breath.

'Have I been such a swine to you?'

She would have liked then to have felt his arms about her and to have told him that he had been more wonderful as a lover than she had ever in her wildest dreams thought a man could be, and that she was desperately in love with him. But no words came. Only two great tears suddenly glittered in her eyes, trembled on the thick dark lashes that he had kissed so often last night, and fell upon her cheeks.

Maurice's heart smote him. He walked straight up to her and gathered her close to him.

'Judy—darling child——'

She relaxed against him for an instant, shut her eyes and pressed her face against his shoulder. Her body was tense and quivering. She felt his hand smoothing her hair; heard him say huskily:

'Poor child, what a damn shame. I'll never forgive myself——'

But it was his pity that she could not bear. Immediately she tore herself out of his arms and cried:

'Don't! Oh, you don't understand. Oh, let me alone—forget about it—*please*.'

A telephone bell rang shrilly through the flat.

Judy stood still, her cheeks hot and wet, her hair rumpled, her heart pounding at a painful rate. Maurice, who had been about to speak to her, turned and walked to the telephone, which stood on a writing-desk by the window.

'Hallo,' he said irritably. Then his voice changed. He added: '*Who* wants me? Oh—*Selsey*!'

He swung round to Judy, who had stiffened at the mention of that name.

'Selsey calling,' he said tersely. 'It must be from Grey Chesters. I don't know how the deuce they found out my number.'

Judy put a hand to her throat and looked at him with wide, scared eyes.

'For heaven's sake, if it is Uncle Charles or any of them, don't let them know that I——'

'Don't be a little idiot—of course I won't let them know you're here. Hallo—hallo. Yes, this is Maurice Fairvill. Who is it? . . . *Kink*. My dear fellow, how are you? Sorry I didn't recognise your voice, but there's rather a buzz on the line.'

Judy listened breathlessly. Kink phoning Maurice—what about? She wondered what dear old Kink would think if he knew that she was here—that she had been here *all night*!

'Oh, I see,' Maurice was saying. 'You phoned up my office. Yes, I told them yesterday that I'd taken my friend's, Lister's, flat for a few weeks. What's that you say? Carol—wants to see me?'

The colour ebbed from Judy's cheeks. What was Kink saying? What did Maurice mean about Carol wanting to see him? What had happened down there at Grey Chesters since she had run away? She turned and walked out of the room, passed blindly into the bedroom where she had slept last night, and in the same sort of blind, unthinking way, packed

her suitcase. When she had straightened her hair and powdered her face, she felt better. Then she heard Maurice calling her.

'Judy! Judy, where are you?'

She put on her hat and coat and walked back to the sitting-room and faced him.

'Yes, Maurice.'

He looked at her queerly, then, with hands in his pockets, frowned at the floor.

'My God, what a life! One never knows what's going to happen next. Kink had a lot to say. Wanted to know where you were, and if I'd seen you, so I more or less told the truth and said that we'd met in the train going up to Town and that you'd put up at the Eccleston, and that he'd find you here this morning if he wanted you. Apparently he does want you. He's coming straight here to see me. And Carol's coming too.'

'Why's Carol coming?' said Judy.

'She wants to see me.'

'You mean,' said Judy, 'that she's changed her mind——'

I don't know. But it seems that she's more ready to believe the truth than she was.'

Judy stood very still. So Carol *had* changed. She wanted to see Maurice. That meant there would be a reconciliation between them. Judy had to hold on to herself very tightly so that she could go on speaking to Maurice calmly. A moment ago she had been in his arms. Now she felt utterly remote from him. That telephone call—the knowledge that Carol was coming; a Carol willing to listen and understand—had separated her, Judy, from him as completely as though a wall had arisen between them.

'I'm very glad Carol's coming,' she said in a low voice. 'It will mean a lot to you and a lot to me, too. Perhaps the harm that I did is going to be undone again.'

Maurice's head shot up, and he said in a queer, fierce voice:

'But last night can't be undone, Judy. Don't you see—

whatever Carol believes now—it's too late——' He broke off and began to pace up and down the room. Judy watched him with a growing sense of futility. For the second time she was going to separate him from Carol. Maybe Carol bitterly regretted her doubts, her disbeliefs, and wanted to give Maurice another chance. Maurice still loved her and would want to take that chance. But he implied it was too late—because of last night.

'I'm not going to come between them again,' she thought desperately, 'I couldn't bear that—I couldn't bear to be the cause of him losing her a second time.'

She turned to the door. Maurice, glimpsing her white little face, came after her.

'Where are you going?'

Back to the Eccleston—anywhere—I don't care.'

'No—stay here. Kink will be up in a couple of hours' time.'

'I don't want to see him,' she said under her breath. 'Or Carol.'

He felt suddenly afraid for her.

'Judy, what are you going to do? For heaven's sake——'

'Don't interfere with me, Maurice,' she said hysterically. 'Please let me pass. You can see Kink and Carol yourself—but I must go my own way.'

He caught her arm.

'Judy, wait a minute. We've all got to think this out.'

'There's nothing to think out,' she interrupted. 'You love Carol and belong to her, and she belongs to you. If she's coming back to you—well, it's only right and proper that she should, and I'm glad—more glad than I can tell you—that I haven't spoilt things after all. I'm not going to spoil them now, either.'

'Judy, child, it isn't so easy as all that—after last night.'

'Oh, you'll drive me mad if you keep on referring to last night!' she interrupted passionately. She dragged her arm away from his fingers. 'I'm going, Maurice, and if you don't leave me alone, I really shall hate you!'

Baffled and perplexed, he drew back. Judy seized her suitcase from the hall and hurried out of the flat, slamming the front door behind her. Maurice ran after her. But she had not even waited for the lift. She had gone down the staircase. He leaned over the banisters and called her name.

'Judy! Judy!'

She did not answer. He walked slowly back into the flat and stood a moment staring round the deserted room. He saw a small chamois-leather glove on the carpet and picked it up. Judy's glove. It must have fallen out of her pocket just now. It looked very small. He remembered what small hands she had—what a little, soft thing she was, altogether. What a passionate, wayward, generous-hearted child!

He wished that she had not run away like this. He felt anxious—even afraid for her.

Carol was coming back. Kink had thrown out more than a hint that she regretted that she had not had more faith in the first instance, and that she wanted to see him and talk things over. He knew that he ought to be crazy with delight at the thought that he stood a chance with her still. He *was* glad, of course, yet somehow the pleasure was very mitigated by the memory of Judy. He thought of Judy's stormy little face; her fury because he had kept on referring to last night. Of course—she wanted to forget her tremendous sacrifice. That he could understand. But he knew that he could never forget it, and never cease to despise himself for accepting her generous surrender.

Carol was coming back too late—because of Judy. And the queer thing was that this time he did not altogether resent the fact that Judy stood between Carol and himself.

His sensations were too chaotic to be defined or analysed. Suddenly he crushed the little glove in his hand, sat down on the Chesterfield, and fumbled blindly for a cigarette.

'God, what a mess—what a ghastly mess!'

He wondered how on earth he was going to face Carol when she came.

CHAPTER 12

JUDY took a taxi outside St. John's Court. Where she was going, and what she meant to do, she had no clear idea. But she was determined not to stay with Maurice. Carol was going back to him. That separated her, Judy, from him quite finally.

As she stood on the pavement, shivering a little as the cold north wind cut through her, she decided that she could not go back to the Eccleston. It would be too embarrassing, after last night.

When Nome and Bart came back from Scotland, she would go to them. They would help her. She knew they would. Until then, she must make a temporary home in a cheap, quiet hotel. Cheap it must certainly be. Her means were very limited, and her chances of getting a job rather remote.

'Where to, miss?' said the taxi-driver.

Judy thought hard. The Graynes lived in Orion Mews, near Marble Arch. It might be a good thing if she found a *pied-à-terre* somewhere near them. She appealed to the taxi-driver. He scratched his head, ruminated, and then thought of what he called 'a respectable little place'—the Chester Hotel, close to Orion Street.

So, half an hour later, Judy was installed in the Chester Hotel. It seemed quiet and respectable enough, but there was an almost frightening atmosphere of gloom about it. A typical unlicensed public dwelling-place graced by the name

of 'Private Hotel'; furnished in the hideous and depressing manner typical of the Victorian age. It was as clean as a century of London grime allowed it to be. But even the top room in which Judy found herself was dark and melancholy and inexpressibly shabby.

Judy looked round her; stared out of the window at roof-tops and chimneys—black, sooty, and ugly against a grey sky—and her already drooping spirits fell to zero.

Oh, for her old bedroom at Grey Chesters! Ironic that this dingy place should bear the name of Chester!—it was so utterly removed from Judy's old home. And oh, for the garden; the trees, the lawn—that lovely glimpse of blue sea and sands, all wet and glistening in the sun.

Then her thoughts turned to the attractive flat in St. John's Court—and Maurice.

She had not the heart to unpack. She sat down on the edge of the narrow and uncomfortable-looking bed, put her face in her hands, and began to cry, softly, hopelessly.

Life seemed very bitter at the moment. Her little world was in ruins about her. Everything seemed to have gone wrong. It was as though she had lived in a nightmare since Christmas Eve, when she had told Carol that wild, unfortunate tale.

First she had unwittingly ruined things for Carol and Maurice. Last night she had ruined things for herself. It was going to take a lifetime to build anything out of the wreckage, and she would need all her courage to make the effort. It had taken some courage for her to rush away from Maurice and his proposal of marriage this morning. She wanted him desperately. Even now, in the midst of misery, she knew a wild thrill of ecstasy at the memory of the strange sweet night they had shared, drawn together by force of circumstance.

The loss of home, of Uncle Charles's and Auntie Vi's affection; of Carol's respect and even of Kink, were secondary to the overwhelming loss of Maurice. But he wasn't really hers to lose. Only for a little while fate had allowed him to belong to her and she to him. And now, of course, he would become Carol's lover again. She pictured

them, both remorseful and longing for reunion, falling into each other's arms. She, Judy, would be forgotten. Carol would not want to remember her. Perhaps Maurice would remember her sometimes, and not unkindly. That was all that she could hope for.

She hoped that she would be able to face things with more spirit to-morrow. But this morning she was sick with misery, and an almost frightening sense of loneliness defeated her.

She supposed Kink would go to the Eccleston to find her. She thought of him wistfully. If only Kink hadn't fallen in love with her, she might have snatched at the comfort of his brotherly interest and affection. But she felt that she owed it to the family, as well as to Kink, not to see him any more—for the present.

Somehow or other she managed to brace herself sufficiently to face luncheon in the dining-room, when a dismal gong boomed through the house. The food was poor and the rest of the people seemed elderly and decayed, and perhaps were as wretched as herself—if not more so. The atmosphere depressed Judy so much that she escaped before the 'canary pudding' and returned to her bedroom. She found a crumpled *Times* in the public lounge, seized it, and took it up to her bedroom.

The sensible thing was to settle down and look for a job and stop thinking about Maurice or the family down at Selsey. She must put that all behind her, once and for all.

When she opened the paper, she suddenly realised that she had not looked at one for two whole days. She had been so involved in her own affairs that the dramas of the world had not concerned her.

It came as a horrid shock to her to see the headline: 'TWO MORE DEATHS RESULTING FROM THE SCOTTISH NIGHT MAIL DISASTER.'

What disaster was that? It was the first she had even heard of one. Instantly it flashed through Judy's mind that Nome, her friend, had travelled up to Scotland on the 10.35 train from King's Cross with her husband, two nights ago.

Judy spread the paper on her bed, and for a moment, white and trembling, scanned the column. Then she found Nome's letter, which was still in her bag. And now she knew beyond doubt that the train which had been taking Nome up to her father in Edinburgh was the one which had been wrecked. One of those rare, ghastly accidents; a collision with a goods train just outside Grantham; coaches telescoping; all the horror of it taking place in the darkness.

Judy felt physically sick. How frightful if anything had happened to Nome! Her best—her only friend.

Another feverish examination of the report of the accident, then Judy's heart seemed to stop beating when she looked down the list of names of '*Killed*' and '*Injured.*' She knew before she actually found the name of Grayne that she was going to see it there in the paper. Her trembling finger stopped beneath the printed letters. '*Mrs. Herbert Grayne. Injured.*' Not killed, thank God. And what of Bart? He must have been in the same carriage with her. But there was no mention of Mr. Grayne.

Judy stood up and pressed her hands to her white cheeks. Was there to be no end to the disasters which were crowding upon her? This accident to Nome was the final blow.

She seized her bag and tore downstairs. In the hall she ran into Mrs. Meekers, the proprietress of the hotel, a stout, brightly dressed lady with dyed flaxen hair which looked as though it was never brushed or combed.

'I want to use the phone!' gasped Judy, without ceremony.

Mrs. Meekers eyed her latest arrival darkly. She was suspicious of everybody and everything, as Judy was to find out. Even an innocent wish on the part of one of her paying guests to use the telephone was not above suspicion.

'Through the lounge,' she said. 'In the little room there you'll find a call-box. You'll want twopence.'

Judy turned and rushed to the call-box, found two pennies, and wrestled with the intricacies of 'Press Button A and B,' so unlike the simple methods at home.

She telephoned through to the Grayne's house in Orion

Mews. They had a daily maid. She might be there and could answer questions. Judy felt that she must find out at once all that there was to know about poor darling Nome.

A man's voice answered her—a rather deep, slow voice which she recognised at once. It was Bart Grayne himself speaking.

'Bart, is it *you*?'

'Yes. Who's that?'

'Judy. Judy Farrell.'

'Judy! Of course. Where are you phoning from?'

'A hotel. I am in Town. Bart—I've just seen the paper. I had no idea—I haven't had time to look at a paper lately—for God's sake tell me about Nome. Is she all right? Are you all right? Were you on the train?'

An instant's silence. Then a voice from which all the life seemed to have departed answered Judy:

'No, I didn't go. At the last moment I had some important work at the office and I couldn't get away. I let Nome go alone. I only wish to God I had been with her—that I was with her now——'

Judy's throat felt dry. She hardly dared voice another question. Then Bart Grayne spoke again, and took all hope from her.

'Nome was in one of the carriages that were telescoped. She was terribly injured. They tell me that she died just as they got her out of the wreckage.'

'*Bart!* Oh, my God, it can't be true! Nome—*dead*?'

'Yes, Judy. Hard to believe, isn't it? She was so full of life.'

Judy tried to control herself. The hand that held the receiver to her ear shook violently. And she had a fleeting vision of Nome at school; such a pretty gay creature, with that sparkling sense of humour which had endeared her to everybody. Burning resentment against the whole of life surged through Judy in that moment. It wasn't fair that Nome should have been taken—Nome, whom Bart adored and who had been her greatest friend.

She gasped through the telephone:

'The papers said she was only injured. I hoped——'

'I hoped, too,' put in Bart Grayne. 'The first report wasn't so bad when they phoned for me. But the poor darling wasn't alive when I got to Grantham. I've only just got back. I've had so much to see to and do. I've got leave from the office, and I'm going up to Edinburgh to-night. You know Nome's father was ill. The poor old man died yesterday, and Nome's mother wants them to be buried together up there. Poor Mrs. Macintyre is prostrate, so I've got to deal with everything. It's all pretty ghastly.'

'What can I do, Bart?' said Judy brokenly. 'What can I say?'

'Not much at the moment, my dear. I'm rather stunned. I don't feel that any of it's real at the moment. I feel that she must come back. She was very fond of you, Judy, and was only talking about you that night when I saw her off at King's Cross. She said you were in some sort of a fix and she wanted to help you. When I come back from Scotland you must let me help, if I can.'

Tears were dripping down Judy's cheeks by this time.

'Thanks awfully,' she whispered.

'What's your address, Judy?'

'The Chester Hotel—quite close to you.'

'Why are you there?' asked Bart in a tone of surprise.

'I've left home for good. I'm looking for a job.'

'My dear child, you're not all by yourself, are you?'

'Yes, quite.'

'But why——'

'I'll explain when I see you,' said Judy with difficulty. 'Don't worry about me. You've troubles enough of your own.'

'You were Nome's oldest friend—you must be mine as well, Judy,' came the man's tired, melancholy voice. 'I'm just going down to Fleet Street this afternoon. You had better look in at my office for a few minutes; about four, if you like; and we'll see what we can do about a job for you.'

'I'm quite useless——' began Judy—but Bart Grayne had rung off.

Judy dried her eyes and walked out of the box. Mrs. Meekers seemed to be waiting for her; peered at her inquisitively and felt her curiosity rewarded when she saw Miss Farrell's flushed, wet face.

'Nothing wrong, I hope,' she said, with a smile which showed a lot of red gum.

Judy shook her head speechlessly. She felt that she could not tell this creature about darling Nome. She walked up to her bedroom, and only by a great effort prevented herself from bursting into tears again. Following so closely upon her *débâcle* with Maurice, Nome's sudden, violent death was difficult to bear. She simply could not believe that she would never see Nome again; that never again would they share a confidence or a joke together, and enjoy the friendship that had been theirs since the early days in Bexhill. Poor little Nome! And she had only been married one short year.

Judy knew well enough that for Nome there would be no more suffering or pain. Bart, the husband, who had adored her, was the one to be pitied, now.

She wondered if the family at Selsey would see the report of Naomi's death in the papers. They would wonder what was happening to her, Judy. She hoped, a little wistfully, that they would give her an anxious thought. She could be sure that Kink would, anyhow; and probably dear old Uncle Charles as well.

What had transpired between Carol and Maurice this morning? Judy thought a lot about that and much too much about Maurice. He seemed so far away from her now. It was almost as though last night had been a wild, beautiful dream. She tried, desperately, to escape from the memory of it and of him. It was altogether too heart-breaking.

She felt that there were tragedies worse than hers when she saw Bart Grayne at the office, later that day. He was, like most of his editorial kind, trying to attend to half a dozen things at once in the rush and tear of the busy hour in a

newspaper office. But he managed to see Judy alone for ten minutes. He told her what he could about his wife, although Judy could see that the subject was one that he could hardly bear to mention. She was shocked with her first sight of him. He had always looked thin—a delicate, slenderly built man—but he had been keen-eyed, cheery, light-hearted as a boy, although some ten years older than Nome. This afternoon in the grey cold light of the winter's afternoon he looked ill, deadly tired and quite an old man. He seemed to have shrunk in size. With elbows on the desk and head between his hands, he described his ghastly rush to Grantham yesterday morning only to find that Nome had died and was beyond his reach.

'God knows why these damnable things are allowed to happen,' he said bitterly. 'Nome and I were so happy. Aren't there thousands of unhappy marriages? Couldn't this have happened to some man who didn't care like I do? And she was so full of life—well, you know that.'

Judy, well aware that he was on the verge of a breakdown, kept her own torn emotions well in check. She stood behind him and put a kindly little hand on his shoulder.

'I was frightfully fond of her, Bart. I can't tell you how sorry I am——'

He gave a deep sigh, roused himself, and smiled up at her. With a pang Judy remembered a letter which Nome had written when first she had become engaged to Bart. She had said:

> 'Bart's not at all handsome. He's rather little and funny. But he's a wonderful person—he makes me laugh—and he's got the sweetest smile you ever saw.'

'Don't let's talk about her any more, Judy,' Bart said gruffly. 'I can't bear it just at the moment. How about you? What's been happening to you? You don't look as fit as when I last saw you. Let's see, when was it? Oh, you came up and spent a night with us at the cottage just before Christmas.'

Judy sat down by the desk, took the cigarette which he gave her, and was glad of it. It steadied her nerves.

'Things have been pretty grim at home, Bart,' she said. 'But I don't feel like worrying you now, when you——'

'Carry on—tell me what you like—it will do me good. I want to forget myself.'

Judy stared at the floor. Bart Grayne was a dear, and Nome's husband. But she could not tell him as much as she might have told poor darling Nome. And she could never tell anybody in the world about last night. That was sacred to her and to Maurice.

Rather painfully she blurted out the story of Carol—the lie she had invented—and of Maurice's return and its sequence. Bart Grayne leaned back in his chair, smoking, and listened with some astonishment. A curious story. And a crazy thing for the child to have done.

For a moment he forgot the red-hot pain that had been searing him ever since he had looked his last upon his young wife's dead body. He concentrated on Naomi's friend. Physically there was a resemblance between the two girls which struck him afresh when he looked at Judy this afternoon. She had the same dark, bobbed head and large brown eyes as Nome. And Judy, as he had known her first, had that same bright gipsy colouring as Nome—betokening perfect fitness.

To-day Judy's face was pale and drawn, and he read tragedy in the large soft eyes. Surely she was too young to be tragic. What else had life done to her? Something more than exile her from her home and relations. A love-affair, perhaps? Was she in love with this fellow, Maurice Fairvill?

But Judy stamped firmly on her inclination to tell Bart too much about Maurice. She just said:

'I loved my cousin, Carol, and I was fond of Maurice. You see how dreadful it is to me to know what I've done. But I'm hoping they may come together again now. There seems every chance of it.'

'Then why don't you go home, my dear?' he said.

'I couldn't,' said Judy. 'You don't know what my aunt said to me. I can never live on her and Uncle Charles again. I must be independent.'

Bart tapped the desk with his pencil.

'So you want a job, eh?'

'Yes, anything,' she said earnestly. 'Absolutely anything.'

'Can you type?'

'Not professionally. I mean, I've only taught myself on a baby machine that Uncle Charles had.'

Bart got up and walked to a desk on the other side of the room. He picked up a letter.

'Sit down and type this out,' he said. 'Miss Waller, the girl who showed you in here, is my stenographer. But we've been so rushed lately we decided that we wanted a younger girl—someone to take telephone messages and type letters. Shorthand wouldn't be necessary. I had thought of somebody much younger than you, but, if you like to take a small salary to begin with, I might fix you up in here.'

The colour came to Judy's cheeks now.

'Oh, Bart—to work here—in your own office—that would be lovely!'

'Type this letter and let's see what you can do,' he said with his swift, charming smile. 'And don't forget that we're always at fever heat in here. This is a newspaper office. Everybody on the *Daily World* is worked to death, including the literary editor.'

'I don't mind how hard I work or how small the pay is, as long as I can live,' said Judy.

With new life in her, she took off her coat, sat down at the desk, and began to type out the letter.

Bart Grayne looked at the back of the dark bobbed head, so prettily set on a slender neck, and thought:

'She *is* like Nome. Perhaps I'm a fool to have her here . . . a constant reminder . . . but I rather like the child and I'm sorry for her. She seems to have had a rotten deal, lately. Nome used to say she was a mass of impulses—well, they've led her into deep waters now all right. But, my God, it's

rather refreshing to come across anybody with such a generous nature. Most of these girls, to-day, take everything and give nothing.'

Judy typed her letter, turned and handed it to him, and watched him with almost childish eagerness.

His haggard face lit up with another smile when he glanced at it.

'Pretty bad. You'll want some practice, my dear. But you'll get that, and you didn't take too long typing it. Good on the phone?'

'I think so.'

'Right. I'll fix you up here right now. Miss Waller is a good sort. She'll look after you. I'm off to Edinburgh to-night, and I daresay I shall be away for three or four days. When I come back, we'll see quite a lot of each other. I'd like to help you, Judy, for Nome's sake as well as your own.'

That nearly reduced her to tears, but she kept a stiff upper lip.

'You don't think me a complete, abject fool for what I did at home?' she asked huskily.

'I don't say you weren't foolish,' said Bart. 'But I realise that the motive was good. Anyhow, what's it matter if your cousin and this fellow are going to patch things up?'

Judy nodded dumbly. She wished she knew whether they *had* patched things up. And she wondered whether Nome's kindly husband would have forgiven her her last and greatest folly. Her cheeks burnt. If only she could forget that . . . yet she didn't want to forget it. She wanted to remember it—all her life.

'I can't offer you more than two pounds a week to start off with,' said Bart. 'You'll be worth more when you've had more experience. Can you manage on that?'

Judy assured him that she could manage, although she had no real idea what it was going to cost her to live. But she was much too pleased to have got this job here, in Bart's own office, to worry about her salary.

Later she was introduced to Miss Waller. It did not take

Judy long to discover that Janet Waller was not only an efficient secretary, but a very sterling character. She had, of course, been trained for this sort of newspaper job. Snce she had left school, at the age of fifteen, life had not been too kind to her. She had had to divide her time between her secretarial course and nursing an invalid mother. Now, at the age of twenty-eight, she was the sole support of that mother, who had a 'heart.' And Judy learned later that Janet had thrown over her one chance of marriage for her mother's sake. Her *fiancé* had wanted her to join him in Kenya, and she had felt she could not desert the mother who had nobody else in the world.

There were, of course, hundreds of these cases—hundreds of people like Janet, who were martyrs to duty, and whose quiet sacrifices were never heard about and rarely rewarded. But Judy felt it was a rare piece of luck for her that she should have such a girl for a fellow-worker. Janet Waller was not of her education or class, but that made no difference to Judy. And when once Miss Waller realised that Judy—although a personal friend of the 'Chief's'—was not at all stand-offish, but just a lonely, miserable girl, she took her under her wing.

It was only a matter of a few days before Judy said good-bye to the gloomy hotel which she detested, and was borne off in triumph by Janet to the Wallers' little house in Upper Norwood, where Judy became a paying guest and found a humble but friendly home.

CHAPTER 13

ONE hour after Judy left the flat in St. John's Court, Maurice telephoned through to the Eccleston. He found it impossible to let Judy go like this. She ought, of course, to marry him. And, even if she did not care enough to spend the rest of her life with him, she must accept him as a protector, a friend. She was so very young, and there was nobody else to look after her.

It did not take him long to find out that Judy was not at the Eccleston, and to realise that she had no intention of returning there. Where she had gone when she left this flat in that passionate, impulsive manner of hers, he could not begin to guess.

It was Kink who thought of ringing up the Graynes. Kink drove his twin sister up to London and brought her straight to Maurice's flat.

An embarrassing meeting for all three of them. Maurice and Kink acknowledged each other briefly and cheerfully, after the manner of men. But Carol appeared nervous and ill at ease, and only murmured:

'Hallo, Maurice,' without lifting her eyes to him.

He looked at her, the more nervous of the two. He drew a chair for her close to the electric fire. It had been a long and chilly drive up from Selsey, and she felt cold. She peeled off her gloves and held her delicate hands out to the still ruddy glow which dispelled the gloom in Lister's sitting-room.

She seemed to Maurice lovelier than ever; she had always known how to dress well; the *chic* brown velvet dress and coat, with cross-fox collar and cuffs, suited her tall slenderness. A small brown velvet turban was set at the new rakish angle on the beautiful blonde head.

His heart contracted painfully as he stood there, silently drinking in the picture of her beauty. It was a picture he had treasured for so many months out in that hell in China. The thought of her—his love for her—had filled his life with a glamour which seemed to have left it now.

He was very conscious this morning of changed emotions. It wasn't that Carol seemed less attractive, nor that he was by nature changeable, but he was no longer certain of her or of himself. She had shown him another Carol—a hard, prudish, suspicious woman under the gentle sweetness of the starry-eyed Carol whom he had adored.

And he was haunted now by the memory of that other girl who had sat in this armchair last night—Judy with her black bobbed head and big brown eyes, so utterly different from her cousin; more youthful, somehow, more sympathetic in her way and so much more generous.

He was altogether unnerved by the memory of that emotional cyclone, a mixture of bitterness and passion, which had flung Judy and himself together last night. He felt ashamed and inarticulate now that Carol was here. And a little ashamed to face Kink, who was Judy's staunch friend.

Kink broke the first awkward silence between them by saying:

'Where's Judy?'

'She was here a couple of hours ago,' said Maurice, and busied himself offering Carol a cigarette, which she took, still avoiding his eye.

'Shall I get her at her hotel if I phone?'

'I don't quite know what's happened to her,' said Maurice with difficulty. 'She isn't at the Eccleston as I thought. I phoned there, myself, a few minutes ago.'

Kink looked at the older man in astonishment.

'But, my dear Maurice, where is she?'

'I honestly don't know,' said Maurice, and added: 'I wish I did. I'm a bit worried about her.'

Carol, from the depths of the armchair, looked up sharply.

'Why worried? What's happened to Judy since she left home? Have you been seeing her, Maurice?'

He found it necessary to lie.

'She came here this morning—just to talk about work.'

'And stayed at the Eccleston last night.'

'Yes.'

Maurice mentally kicked himself, walked to the window, and stared down at the courtyard. He knew now that, whatever Carol had to say and however much she regretted breaking her engagement with him, things would never be the same between them again. He had made that story which Judy had invented come true. It all seemed very crazy. And of course he ought still to be madly in love with Carol, and to despise Judy's memory. But he didn't.

When Carol had broken faith and sent him away, that night, he had stamped on his love for her, and it was as though he had trampled it beyond repair.

'Well, if Judy isn't at her hotel, she'll probably be with the Graynes,' announced Kink. 'We must get on to her. Dad agreed with me that we couldn't chuck Judy out like this. He believes in her. The mater doesn't understand. But I do. And you do, now, don't you, Caro?' He turned to his sister.

Maurice also turned and looked at the girl in the chair. Her delicate face flushed, and she bit nervously at lips which were just touched with rouge.

'I'm trying to understand,' she said in a low voice.

'Of course, it is *obvious* that damn story was invented by Judy,' said Kink heatedly.

Carol kept her long fair lashes lowered and smoked nervously, in silence. Maurice began to pace up and down the room.

'Judy would never have done such a thing,' added Kink, 'and neither would Maurice.'

The red blood mounted to Maurice's forehead. He thought:

'God, what a swine, what a cad I've been! What's going to be the end of it? If only Judy would come back.'

It was queer how much he wanted Judy to come, now.

'We'll ring up the Graynes,' said Kink, who was doing all the talking.

'There's a phone on the desk over there, if you want it,' said Maurice.

Neither he nor Carol spoke or looked at each other while Kink telephoned to the Graynes' cottage in Orion Mews. Bart Grayne was out at the time that Kink got through. A maid said that she could give him no news of Miss Farrell, and, as far as she knew, Miss Farrell was not expected there.

Bitterly disappointed, Kink conveyed this information to Maurice and his sister. The maid had not mentioned the tragedy of Mrs. Grayne's death; and, although the family at Selsey had read about the Scottish night mail disaster, none of them had noticed Naomi's name among the list of 'injured.'

'Well, if Judy isn't with those friends of hers, I can't think where she is,' said Kink in a worried voice.

'I've no idea,' said Maurice. He wished to God he had not let Judy run away like that this morning. It worried him badly not to know where she had gone or what she meant to do with herself.

'Judy hasn't got any other friends up here, as far as I know,' Carol ventured to say, 'but I daresay she'll write home, and we shall know where she is eventually. She's quite old enough to look after herself. You're all making rather a fuss about nothing.'

'Well, I've got to get on to the hospital,' said Kink gloomily. 'I ought to have been there long ago. I'll leave you two to chat. If any news of Judy comes along, let me know.'

'I'll see you later, Kink,' said Carol. She had arranged to stay the night in Town with him.

After the boy had gone, an awkward silence fell between

Maurice and Carol. Then she said with a nervous laugh:

'Kink's much too fond of Judy. Rather a pity, isn't it?'

'Why a pity?'

'The family don't believe in first cousins marrying—nor do I. Do you?'

Maurice gave her a quick look, and then stared at the floor.

'I see. I didn't realise he was fond of her that way.'

'Oh, I don't think it will last,' said Carol. 'He knows it's hopeless. And she isn't the only girl in the world for Kink by any means. There's a little probationer at the hospital who's intriguing him. And I'll give Judy her due—she's quite sensible about Kink—she won't encourage it. I don't think she's at all in love with him.'

Maurice stood leaning his arm on the mantelpiece and stared at the fire. He had a sudden vision of Judy in his arms; of a cheek, wet with tears, pressed to his own; a soft quivering mouth yielding to his kisses . . . and in the darkness two soft, bare arms drawing him closer. His heart beat at a queer rate. He thought:

'I might have imagined she was in love with me, but she wasn't—it was her way of making amends. How unspeakable of me to have taken all that she gave!'

He looked suddenly at Carol and said:

'Carol, why have you come here to-day?'

'Kink thought I ought to see you.'

'Oh! It was only because of what Kink thought.'

'No,' said Carol awkwardly, 'not altogether. I've been thinking things over and—come to the conclusion that I was too hasty that night you came back.'

He clenched his hands, stung by the memory of the intolerable pain he had suffered that night when, after her rejection of him, he had gone back grimly to Chichester. All through the lonely hours, sleepless with fever and the bitterness of his thoughts, his emotions had been dragged out brutally into the open, and he had almost watched them die. Nothing now could bring back the gorgeous enthusiasm of that first young love, which had been so absolute, so blind. All that ecstasy

had been for the Carol who had promised to marry him and been the inspiration of all things. That Carol seemed to have died. Somebody with a cold, relentless streak in her had taken her place, somebody he could not love in the old rapturous fashion.

Her suspicion and her ready belief of Judy's crazy tale had altered things irreparably. Suspicion and disbelief could be such terribly destroying things.

He said suddenly, roughly:

'Why hadn't you a little more faith in my love for you, Carol? Why in God's name were you so willing to accept Judy's story?'

She pulled nervously at the gloves in her lap.

'I don't know. You see—well—why should it ever have entered my head that Judy concocted the story?'

'You know now that she did, don't you?'

'I—suppose so,' said Carol, swallowing hard.

'You *must* know it. You must realise that in those days, before I went back to China, I was madly in love with you—I had no time, no thought for any other woman. I couldn't, conceivably, have taken Judy away for a night. Surely if you'd thought things out clearly you'd have realised that.'

'Perhaps I didn't think them out very clearly,' she stammered. 'I'd been so ill—I almost went mad, wondering whether you were alive or dead. And then, when news came of your death, I didn't feel I wanted to live. Nobody could say I didn't love you,' she added, with almost childish petulance.

'If you felt it as badly as all that, it makes your lack of faith even more incomprehensible,' he said.

'The family will tell you—I *did* care—they thought I was going out of my mind——'

'Exactly,' he caught her up. 'And that's why Judy invented the story. To try and save you. Oh, I know it was outrageous—I could have killed her for it—it was a frightful thing to have done—but I know why she did it. And you must know now, too.'

Carol drew off her velvet cap and threaded her fingers wearily through the shining strands of her hair.

'Yes,' she said slowly, 'I suppose I do know it now. The more I think about it the more convincing the explanation becomes. But, after all, if you can excuse Judy for doing such a dreadful thing, you can make excuses for me, too. Once she made me believe that you weren't worthy of my love—that I was a fool to go on breaking my heart for you—I had a sort of reaction. I tried to hate you, to fling myself into having a good time.'

'You succeeded in hating me, and you had a very good time, didn't you?'

The hardness of his voice made her wince. She looked up at him with a kind of hurt surprise in her large blue eyes. Nobody had ever spoken to her so harshly as this in her sheltered life. It was difficult to believe that this was the Maurice who had once adored her. In the old days he would have been at her feet by now, kissing her hands, anxious to please, to serve her. She began to realise what she had lost. On the other hand, there was Grant Maddison. He was very much in love with her at the moment, and she had intended to marry him. What a dreadful muddle Judy had made of things.

Carol wondered helplessly what could be done. Quite definitely she was no longer in love with Maurice. On the other hand, if she had wronged him, she supposed that she owed him a second chance. It was all very boring—particularly as it would mean that she must put Dr. Maddison right out of her life.

She really felt exceedingly embarrassed with Maurice. But vanity prompted her to reproach him for his attitude. It did not suit Carol at all to be criticised or condemned. She loved admiration—it was the breath of life to her. And, even now, she wanted to feel that Maurice was still breaking his heart for her, and not as cold or indifferent as he appeared to be.

'Why are you so unkind?' she asked sorrowfully. 'Can't you understand what reaction is?'

He smiled grimly. 'God, yes, he understood that. Reaction had set in with him. He knew only too well that certain things, certain circumstances, can alter the whole of a person's outlook in a day or a night.

'I don't mean to be unkind, my dear,' he said more gently, 'but it was rather a blow to me to find not only had you broken faith with me, but decided to marry this other fellow.'

Carol bit her lip and shrugged her shoulders.

'I need not accept his proposal.'

'Don't let me stand in the way,' said Maurice coldly.

She looked up at him in swift surprise, and sheer vanity made her say:

'Maurice! Don't you care about *me* any more?'

It was his turn to stare at her.

'I don't understand you. Do you *want* me to care for you? How can you—after your attitude to me—and your feeling for this other man?'

She floundered helplessly in a sea of muddled thought. Carol was not very clever, and the situation was rather beyond her now. She had far better let Maurice deal with it.

'Oh, you don't understand,' she said plaintively. 'Things have all changed again. I'm quite willing to believe that Judy told me that absurd story to try and save me from wasting the rest of my life brooding over your death. I suppose we all ought to start again, oughtn't we?'

He looked down at her, his thin brown face set and strained.

'Have you come here this morning to tell me that you are quite willing to marry me now?'

'Yes—I—well, yes,' she said a trifle wildly.

'Oh, my God!' said Maurice, and turned and hid his face against his arm, which was still resting on the mantelpiece.

Carol, wide-eyed, looked at his back. She had expected him to fall at her feet, crazy with joy—to take her in his arms and tell her he couldn't have endured life without her. But he didn't seem to want to do any of these things. And now, with

the typical perversity of human nature, she was annoyed by his attitude, and considerably piqued.

She rose, stood near him, and touched his shoulder with her long white fingers.

'Maurice——'

His body was tense and unresponsive to her touch, and he did not look at her. He was going through a little hell of his own in that moment. He was bitterly ashamed. Carol's unexpected offer to renew their engagement made him ashamed. For he knew that he did not want to marry her now, and that he was no longer in love with her. And the remorse was for Judy—Judy, whom he had wronged much more profoundly than she had wronged him. How ironic of fate to have let things happen this way. How strange and bitter to know that he did not want Carol now, when she was willing to return to him.

'Maurice,' came her soft voice, 'I really don't believe you *do* love me any more.'

Then he raised his head and looked at her. His eyes were suffused.

'Carol, it's dear and sweet of you to have come back like this—but I'm afraid it's too late now.'

She flushed and stared.

'Too late? I don't understand.'

'I can't possibly explain,' he said. 'I can only tell you that it *is*—too late.'

She drew back, a little humiliated but considerably relieved. After all, this meant that she need not send Grant Maddison away. He was more her 'type' than Maurice; older; cleverer; and of course he had a good deal more money, which counted these days. And it was quite obvious, after this morning's interview with him, that if she married Maurice they would neither of them be very happy. Things had fallen curiously flat between them.

'I appreciate what you've done this morning,' put in Maurice, 'because I know you really don't care for me any more. There's this other chap.'

'Y-es,' she faltered, 'but—oh, I don't know——' She flung out her arms with a gesture of bewilderment. 'I don't know what's happened to any of us. We've all gone mad. We've all changed.'

'So it seems,' said Maurice, with a queer laugh.

'I suppose I *was* pretty beastly to you,' said Carol in a low voice. 'I don't wonder you don't want me any more. I'm sorry, Maurice.'

In her softest moments nobody could be more charming than Carol, and Maurice, who had once loved her very deeply, was touched now by her unexpected humility. He seized her hand and held on to it.

'My dear, I haven't only changed because of what *you* did to me-——' He broke off abruptly, wrung her fingers, and turned away to find a cigarette. 'Oh, I can't explain—but it's pretty impossible for us to get back to the old footing, Caro.'

'In that case, I shan't hurt you at all if I do marry Dr. Maddison?'

Maurice stared out of the window.

'No,' he said in a low voice.

And he kept wondering where Judy was and what she was doing, and wishing to God that he knew. It was Judy, and last night, that had changed him so irreparably. He knew it. And knew that it was futile for him to go on struggling with thoughts and emotions which seemed to have no beginning and no end.

CHAPTER 14

It took Maurice Fairvill exactly a week in which to find out where Judy had gone. During that week, Judy, firmly installed in the Fleet Street Office of the *Daily World* and in the Wallers' house in Norwood, firmly made up her mind that she was never going to see Maurice again.

Before Bart Grayne came back from his melancholy visit to Scotland, Judy had grown accustomed to the rush and tear of life in the office, and had tried to erase the memory of the past few weeks, and adapt herself and her ideas to the new life which she was leading.

She could not complain of dullness at the office. The hours spent there teemed with interest. There was very little time to sit down and brood over the past.

Judy's fellow-worker, Miss Waller, was a kindly friend, and a tower of strength on whom the younger girl could rely for help and advice both in the office and outside it. And, once Judy settled down as a paying guest in the Wallers' house, she grew both to like and respect her new friends. But it was when she got away from work, in the quiet hours of the evening, that the thought of Maurice, and all that he had meant to her, crowded back upon her. But she told herself that it was a heartache that must be endured, and that she must hide from the rest of the world. She did not want Bart Grayne or the Wallers to think that she was grieving so bitterly for a man who could never possibly return her love.

The first day Bart came back to the office, when he had a few seconds to spare, he called Judy to his desk and told her that Maurice Fairvill had telephoned through to his house while he was up north.

'I understand there have been several enquiries about you,' he said, 'and Alice naturally said that she knew nothing about you or where you were. I rather gather, from what she said, that your cousin, young Riverson, has asked for news of you, as well as Fairvill. Alice told them that I was away and that they'd get me here at the office later in the week. But no doubt, if the family are hunting for you, they'll find you here eventually.'

Judy, the colour coming into her cheeks, stared at the blotter on Bart's desk and said:

'Yes, I suppose they will. I don't mind getting into touch with dear old Kink, but——'

'You don't want this fellow Fairvill to find you, eh?' put in Bart, watching her keenly.

The flush receded from her face again.

'Not particularly,' she said in a low voice. 'I can't see why he wants to see me, anyhow. But perhaps he won't ring up again.'

But Maurice did ring up again. Judy, typing out an article which the literary editor had written for his leader page, answered most of the incoming calls. Her heart gave a tremendous leap when she heard the one voice which she could not fail to recognise:

'Is that the editorial office of the *Daily World*?'

'Yes,' said Judy.

'May I speak to Mr. Grayne?'

'I'm not sure whether he's in at the moment,' said Judy, using the formula passed on to her by Janet Waller. 'Will you hold the line a minute and I'll just see. What name shall I say?'

Maurice, who did not seem to recognise Judy's voice, answered:

'Mr. Fairvill.'

Then Judy, with a scarlet face and a pounding heart, put her hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone and looked across, with large, scared eyes, at the big desk where the literary editor sat attending to a dozen things at once.

For a moment Judy felt stupidly incompetent to deal with the situation. She knew perfectly well why Mr. Fairvill wanted Bart. He meant to make enquiries about *her*. Little doubt Maurice knew, now, about poor little Nome. He, and possibly the family down at Selsey, were curious to know what was happening to her, Judy, now that her friend was dead. Perhaps they were a little anxious. But if Maurice were anxious, Judy could only attribute it to a guilty conscience. He could not have any real desire to find her or see her again. By this time he and Carol must be reconciled. No, there could be no reason why he should want to find her except to make sure that she was all right. He was like that. Hadn't he proved it by asking her to marry him after that unforgettable night? He wasn't the sort of man who could do what he had done without feeling deeply contrite. She could give him his due. But she was not going to see him again, just to be the object of his pity and his penitence.

She must do something—say something—Maurice was waiting there at the other end of the line.

Judy got up and crossed to Bart's desk.

'Bart—Maurice Fairvill's on the phone—asking to speak to you.'

He looked up at her with his quick, sweet smile.

'Well, what do you want me to tell him, Judy?'

'I—don't know——' she stammered.

'He'll want to know about you. What shall I say?'

'I really don't know—it's all so difficult,' she said, feeling singularly stupid.

'Give me the phone. I'll tell him to go to hell if you want me to.'

Then Judy, with the inconsistency of her sex, stammered:

'I—oh, no—perhaps I'd better speak to him——'

'Go ahead then—and, if you want any help, ask for it.'

He sat back in his chair and looked after Judy's small, slim figure in the tweed skirt and green wool jumper as she returned to the telephone. He smiled a trifle sadly. It was pretty plain that little Judy was in love with Fairvill. She didn't really hide it very well. She had such tell-tale eyes—lovely, velvety eyes—like Nome's He never looked at Judy without remembering, vividly the young wife he had adored and lost with such tragic suddenness. He did not know much about this Maurice Fairvill, nor understand why he pursued Judy. Judy had given him to understand that the fellow was in love with her cousin. Whatever the facts were, Bart did not want Judy to suffer. She was such a lovable child.

Judy, back at her own desk, was speaking to Maurice in a frozen little voice, although every nerve in her body was quivering.

'This is Judy Farrell—yes—Judy. Is there anything I can do.'

She was a little surprised at the warmth of Maurice's voice when he answered her.

'Judy! *You!* My dear, I *am* glad. So you're there—in Grayne's office? I had a sort of wild hope you might be. Judy, everybody's been looking for you. Why on earth didn't you let us know where you were?'

Judy put up a hand and clutched the beads about her neck.

'I didn't see any object in letting anybody know. I'm on my own now—and I want to be left to make my own life my own way.'

'That's absurd. Look here, Judy, I want to see you ——'

'No,' broke in Judy breathlessly. 'I'd rather not—really.'

'But, Judy——'

'Please forget that I exist,' she broke in again. 'I'm perfectly happy and quite well. I've got a good job, and I'm living with a girl who works with me here. Nobody need worry about me.'

Then Maurice's voice again—peremptory this time:

'That may be, but I want to see you all the same.'

Judy set her teeth. Oh, yes; she could imagine why.

Another embarrassing scene—Maurice anxious to do the right and honourable thing—willing to sacrifice both himself and Carol. But she wasn't going to allow him to indulge in any fine feelings of that sort. Nor would she have him 'make an honest woman of her.' Not though she loved him with every drop of blood in her body, and always would.

'Please, Maurice, believe me when I tell you that I'd rather not see you,' she spoke into the telephone, and now the hand holding the receiver to her ear was shaking. 'I'm frightfully busy—so will you forgive me if I ring off?'

'Judy—wait—this is quite ridiculous. I have a great deal to say to you——'

'Nothing that can alter me,' she said desperately.

An instant's silence. Then a rather unhappy laugh from Maurice.

'I'm sorry you dislike me so much——'

Dislike him! Judy closed her eyes. She fought with a wild inclination to drop the receiver, put on her coat and hat, and rush round to Maurice's flat. She would throw herself into his arms and say:

'I love you—I belong to you—take me and never let me go. All these days and nights since I last saw you have been dreadful—I can't bear any more of it!'

She had a crazy vision of him holding her as he had held her once—it seemed a century ago—very, very close; when his lips had strayed from her shut eyelids to her mouth and he had whispered:

'Little Judy, how sweet you are!'

But that would not be at all what he would do or say if she rushed round to him to-day. She could so well imagine what would happen. She could see the brown, scarred face puckering with embarrassment and worry, and the attractive blue eyes regarding her full of gloom. He would say:

'Of course—I *ought* to marry you, but——'

Never would she marry Maurice just because he thought he *ought* to marry her. She would not risk that. A thousand times no.

He was saying something else through the telephone, but she didn't wait to hear what he said. Her forehead and the palms of her hands were wet. As though terrified, she hung up the receiver and turned blindly to her typewriter.

Let him go on thinking that she disliked him. Perhaps that was the better way. She must at all costs put an end to this quixotic wish on his part to make the *amende honorable*. She did not know whether he would accept his *congé* so peacefully. He was stubborn. He might come round and try to see her. She hoped that he wouldn't. It would be too agonising for her. If only he would let the whole thing drop now, and return in peace to the woman he really loved.

Judy was astonished to find that she was trembling so violently with nerves, following that brief telephonic conversation, that she could not get ahead with her work. She tried to type an ordinary word, and struck all the wrong letters.

Miss Waller, with a friendly eye on her, rose from her own desk and crossed to the younger girl's side.

'Anything wrong, Ju? You've come all over white, dear?'

'Oh—I'm all right—only a headache,' replied Judy.

'It's just on four,' said Miss Waller. 'Ed will be in with the tea in a second.'

Edward, the small, freckled office-boy, came in at that moment bearing two large white cups of brown, sticky-looking tea which had slopped over the biscuits in both saucers. Miss Waller accepted hers, wrinkling her nose at the sodden biscuit. Judy drank her cup, glad of the hot and stimulating liquid. She did not want the biscuit.

Heavens, how dry her throat felt! Ridiculous that she should feel like this just because Maurice had rung up. And this was the penalty of loving—and specially of loving somebody who meant everything, and to whom you had given everything, but who didn't really want you at all.

Janet Waller sat on the edge of her desk and chatted in her friendly fashion. Only too gladly Judy welcomed her presence and her chatter. Funny old Janet, with her old-fashioned bun of mouse-coloured hair, horn-rimmed

spectacles, and stout Victorian figure, which made her look forty instead of twenty-eight. There was nothing beautiful about Janet except her strong teeth, which were exceptionally white, and her blue, inteiligent eyes. She had plenty of annoying habits. She was prone to constant colds, and would bring with her, incessantly, the pungent odour of eucalyptus, and a perpetual sniff. She also had an irritating way of shortening everybody's name. It was 'Ju' and 'Ed' and, even at home, Mrs. Waller was called 'Muth.' Judy was quite sure, if Janet produced an uncle, she would label him 'Unk.' In a way it amused her; anyhow, she liked Janet. She did at least exude motherliness and kindness. And that was really what Judy wanted at the moment.

Janet Waller, on her part, had grown almost fiercely attached to this new young friend who lodged with her and her mother. Like many large, plain women, she felt a pathetic admiration for any member of her own sex who was small and pretty. And there was a pathetic look in Judy's enormous brown eyes, and a droop to the curved red mouth, which touched Janet and made her want to comfort her. Hence she had constituted herself a sort of guardian angel to Judy. And woe betide anybody who hurt Judy while she was in *her* care.

Judy had told her a little about the affairs which had led her to leave home for good and all. But she had only discussed Maurice very warily. It was left to Janet to guess that Judy was the victim of an unhappy love-affair. It was written in those brown, tell-tale eyes. Janet tactfully refrained from questioning her, but she worried about the child. It didn't seem to her that Judy ever ate enough or slept really soundly. Only last night she had walked into Judy's bedroom unexpectedly and found her in tears.

She wished Judy would tell her about it. But, if ever they had discussed men, love, sex, it had been impersonally. Judy seemed shy of the subject. Janet, who had had only the one affair in her youth, which ended in smoke, was full of theories about these matters, but had had very little experience.

She had formulated a series of 'bromidic' ideas and remarks, which she very quickly let loose on Judy, who listened, half-amused.

Men were brutes . . . a girl had to be careful . . . a man only had one idea in his head when he started fooling round . . . the keener you were on a man the less he wanted you . . . and vice versa . . . boys and girls were too free and easy anyhow these days . . . etc., etc.

Such slogans poured from Janet's lips *ad nauseam*. This afternoon, following upon the telephone call of Maurice, Judy looked so white and pinched in the face, that Janet Waller felt quite alarmed.

'Let's go to Lyons Corner House for tea and then see the pictures,' she suggested. 'It would buck you up, and you're to be my guest.'

Judy finished her tea, and smiled.

'You're a dear, Janet, but, as a matter of fact'—she lowered her voice—'I'm going out to dinner to-night with—' She turned her head a little in Bart Grayne's direction.

Miss Waller pushed her horn-rims up to her forehead.

'Oh. So you're going on the razzle with the Chief. Well, good luck. Perhaps you'll cheer each other up—he's got himself all sunk since that dreadful business of his wife.'

'I only wish I could cheer him up,' said Judy sadly. 'But nobody can do that. It's just too rotten, isn't it?'

'It doesn't do to get too fond of anybody——' began Miss Waller. But Judy was spared a further 'bromide' by the entrance of Edward, the office-boy.

'Someone in the waiting-room to see Miss Farrell.'

Judy's hand went to her throat. If it were Maurice . . . then the boy handed her a card, and she was very surprised to see her uncle's name on it. *Colonel C.B. Riverson.* So Uncle Charles, as well as Maurice, had found out her whereabouts.

'It's a relative of mine,' she told Janet, and crossed to the Chief's desk.

'Bart, my uncle's come to see me. Can I desert my post for a few minutes?'

'Of course, child; run along,' he said.

Judy passed down the big noisy corridor and came to the frosted window marked 'Waiting Room.'

When she saw the familiar figure of her uncle, who stood there, hat and stick in his hand, she was conscious of very real pleasure. She ran to him and impulsively threw her arms around his neck.

'Uncle—darling!'

'Judy, my dear——' The Colonel put down hat and stick and hugged her warmly. 'Bless me, I'm glad to see you. But you've been a naughty girl—a *very* naughty girl——'

'Why?' She hung on to his arm, looking up at him guiltily.

'Not letting us know where you'd got to.'

'I didn't think you'd want to know—at least I didn't think Auntie Vi minded any more——'

The Colonel cleared his throat.

'My dear, your aunt is a trifle hasty—she jumped to conclusions. We were all rather bewildered, you know, by that foolish business. It *was* very foolish of you.'

Judy, whose cheeks had become warm and pink with pleasure at the meeting with her uncle, looked pale and pinched again.

'Yes, I know,' she said in a low voice. 'It was a *crazy* thing to have done, Uncle Charles, but I rushed into it because I was so afraid about Carol's state of mind. And of course I never *dreamt* Maurice would come back.'

'An extraordinary business,' said the Colonel, shaking his head. 'But I think we all know where we are now.'

'Do you mean Auntie Vi actually believes in me?' Judy asked curiously.

'I think so, my dear. We've all had a long talk about you—the twins saw Maurice again the other day—and we're all quite sure that your—er—dramatic story was a myth.'

'I'm glad,' said Judy in a low voice. Then added, with some difficulty: 'I suppose Maurice and Carol have—made it up?'

'Not so far as I know,' said the Colonel.

Judy looked up quickly, startled.

'Why not? I don't understand. If she realises now that Maurice and I——' She broke off confusedly.

'My dear,' said the Colonel, sitting down. 'It's all very involved. I don't quite know myself, how matters stand between Carol and the young man. But there's been no talk of renewing their engagement. As a matter of fact, I believe they are meeting this evening. Carol's up in Town for a night or two with Kink. I'm only up for the day. But I can't tell you any more details about those two.'

Judy thought hard for a moment. She took it for granted that Maurice and Carol wanted to renew their engagement. Of course, it was only a matter of time before they fixed things up again. Obviously Maurice, still conscience-stricken about her, was diffident about committing himself with Carol before he had made quite sure that she, Judy, would not marry him.

'How did you find me, Uncle Charles?' she asked, forcing her thoughts away from Maurice.

He told her. It was through Bart Grayne, of course. Then the Colonel plied Judy with questions about herself. He was fairly satisfied that she was not in any need, and that she was enjoying her work here, but he tried to induce her to return to Selsey with him.

'I don't like the idea of my sister's child without a proper home. Grey Chesters has always been your home, and your aunt is quite willing, and I am only too anxious, for you to come back, Judy,' he concluded.

Judy's eyes filled with tears.

'Dear Uncle Charles! It's sweet of you and magnanimous of Auntie Vi. But I'm not coming back. I can't. Don't ask me to explain—I just can't. I want to make my own life up here. I'm perfectly happy. Miss Waller and her mother are awfully kind to me—and Bart's a dear. We get on awfully well. Nome was my greatest friend at school as you know.'

'Yes, yes, I know,' he sighed. 'And that was a tragic business, that railway disaster. Well, my dear, if you are

determined to go on with your job, I won't interfere. But you must come down to us for a rest and a change when you need it. I do want you to regard Grey Chesters still as your home. I'm sure the twins feel that way about it, too.'

Judy, biting her lips hard, said:

'I don't suppose Caro will ever feel the same towards me again, and I don't blame her. I'd like to see Kink some time. How is he?'

'Had a touch of sciatica—funny thing for a boy of his age. He isn't very strong, as you know, and they work him pretty hard at the hospital. Now look here, my dear, when will you come down to stay with us?'

'Some time. Yes, I'd like to—but not just yet,' she said with a break in her voice.

The Colonel did not quite understand. He pulled the lobe of his ear and looked at her dubiously. The whole business was queer and disturbing. And he didn't think Judy looked too well. Quite haggard, in fact, in that mercilessly revealing office light with its harsh opal shade.

He stayed talking to Judy for a while longer, and insisted on giving her a generous cheque. He would not accept a refusal. Her pay was barely enough to keep her, he maintained, and she must take an allowance. It would hurt and worry him unless she did.

Judy took it. She had meant to be quite independent, but she knew that it was going to be rather hard to live decently on forty shillings a week. And it would be rather nice if she could afford to do little things for the Wallers now and then. They had been so good to her.

But she could not bring herself to accept an invitation to Selsey at the moment. Too much had happened between Maurice and herself for that. It would be more than she could endure, to live under the same roof with Caro and know that in time Caro would become Maurice's wife.

One thing that Judy particularly wanted to know she asked her uncle before he left.

'I suppose Caro isn't seeing any more of Kink's friend, Dr.

Maddison? She was on the verge of an engagement to him just before Maurice came back, wasn't she?'

'Ah,' said Colonel Riverson, 'there lies a double tragedy. Poor Maddison was very fond of Carol, so Kink tells me. But for more than one reason he's had to drop out of things. They discovered a spot on one lung. T.B.'s in the family, I'm told. Dreadful thing—such a brilliant fellow! He's had to give up his work and go to Switzerland. He hasn't seen Carol any more. He said good-bye to her through Kink. And he felt it very badly. It was a funny thing—it all happened before he knew Maurice was alive. But, you see, he would have had to have broken with Caro anyhow. Carol seemed pretty cut up about it. Been most depressed. But perhaps Maurice will cheer her up and everything will come right between those two again.'

Judy's heart beat slowly and painfully. So there was every reason now why Maurice and Carol should come together. Even Dr. Maddison had dropped out of it. There would be nothing to keep Carol from Maurice; and every reason why the old flame of love should revive between them.

Judy had a sudden agonising vision of Maurice—Maurice as the lover which he had been for a few stolen crazy hours. It was followed by a blinding sense of loss and loneliness. But she smiled steadily at the Colonel, and half convinced him, before he said good-bye to her, that she was quite pleased with life.

CHAPTER 15

BUT Judy was not by any means finished with her secret battle against her heartache and that longing to let Maurice keep her with him at any price.

One late afternoon in February, she came out of the big white stone building which had recently been erected in Fleet Street for the *Daily World* into the mist of a dismal, chilly evening, and found Maurice, himself, standing on the steps. He had evidently been watching for her.

Judy stopped dead when she saw him. For a briéf space her heart-beats seemed to stop as well. She gave one frightened look at him, then turned and took the arm of Bart Grayne, who was coming out of the office with her. It was as though she silently appealed to Bart for protection—against herself rather than against Maurice.

But Maurice, raising his hat, came forward quickly and spoke to her.

'Judy—can you spare me a few minutes—will you come and have a cocktail somewhere . . . '

She looked straight up into eyes which were amazingly blue in the brown face of this man who had become so distractingly dear to her. He looked well; not nearly so fine-cut, so drawn, as when she had last seen him. And Judy had never been more aware of Maurice's physical strength and lithe handsome body. She felt the most absurd inclination to say to Bart:

'This man has been my lover—I belong to him and he belongs to me. Nobody in the world knows except he and I. It's broken my heart in pieces, but I'm proud . . . yes, I'm not a bit ashamed, because I love him so much. . . . '

And, instead, she said with quite creditable nonchalance:

'Oh, hello, Maurice. How are you? Can I introduce you to Mr. Grayne? . . . Bart, this is Maurice Fairvill . . . an old friend of the family's . . . '

That sounded very natural, and it seemed to put Maurice into an ordinary place which had no particular connection with herself. The two men shook hands and sized each other up.

Bart thought:

'So this is Judy's Mr. Fairvill. Attractive fellow, all right, and looks a decent, sensible sort of chap. Now why the hell is he hanging round Judy when he's in love with this cousin of hers?'

Maurice thought:

'Grayne looks a nice chap, but rottenly ill. Poor devil! Losing his wife like that was a bad show . . . '

And after that he forgot Bart Grayne and concentrated on the girl. Now that he saw her again he was a little astonished to find how greatly the meeting with her affected him. The thought of her had never really left him since she had rushed away from Lister's flat that memorable morning. It might have been a year instead of a month ago. He was quick to notice the change in her face. None of that bright gipsy colouring was left. She was white and hollow-eyed. And somehow the Judy who had just looked up into his eyes seemed remote from the passionate impulsive child whose generosity overbalanced commonsense and withal was so adorable.

She had grown up. Her tone, her manner, were horribly distant. Maurice was quite disheartened by her greeting, and astonished that he should be so; for such a short while ago Judy's welcome had not mattered to him much one way or the other.

'I'd like to have a chat with you, if you can spare the time,' he said, and stood there before her, hat and stick in hand.

She found herself looking at the jagged scar across his cheek. Once, in the darkness, her shy lips had traced every line of it. In pity and passion she had whispered:

'They did that to you—those Chinese fiends—you poor darling!'

And he had answered in the absurd fashion of his kind:

'Pooh—it's only a scratch! What does it matter?'

Perhaps it didn't matter. Certainly a physical cut can't hurt as badly as a mental one. Judy felt, in that moment of meeting on the office steps, that if her mind and her heart could have taken form, they would have shown a thousand scars. Loving him had hurt much too much for her soul's good. Although people said that this sort of thing was good for the soul. She didn't feel that way about it. She didn't feel at all brave or strong or any the better for her punishment.

Bart Grayne, feeling it needful to show a little tact, said:

'If you'd like a cocktail with your friend, Judy, we can meet later on. I think you said you wanted to dress. How about *Chez Monseigneur* at 7.30 o'clock? I'll fetch you in the car. We did the Carlton last time.'

That was not at all tactful, if he had but known it. Instinctively Judy met Maurice's gaze. A furious blush scorched her cheeks. At *Chez Monseigneur they* had dined at the beginning of that feverish evening—unforgettable for both of them.

She did not want to have a cocktail with Maurice. She did not want to argue with him and be hurt unnecessarily. She had been hurt quite enough already, but she was cornered, and she knew it. She could not get out of this without being definitely rude to Maurice.

'I—not *Chez Monseigneur*. I'm always being taken there.' She tried to laugh as she looked at Bart. 'Could we go to the Savoy, Bart? I love the Savoy.'

She didn't love the Savoy. She had never in her life been

there. But Bart courteously told her that it would suit him admirably, raised his hat, and left her standing there with Maurice.

'Now, Judy,' said Maurice rather grimly, 'what about a taxi? And where shall we have our cocktails? What about coming back to my flat?'

'Oh—no!' said Judy in a panic-stricken voice.

He looked down at the small, pretty face which looked so desperately white and tired in the bluish shadows of the evening. The expression in the big dark eyes horrified him.

'Good heavens! you're not *afraid*—you don't imagine—— Good God, can't you *trust* me?'

She felt herself trembling. Her cheeks were on fire.

'Yes, of course—but I'd rather not go back to that flat.'

It was his turn to flush. Rather more coldly he said:

'Very well—we'll drop in at the Piccadilly. How long have you got? Where do you live?'

'Near the Crystal Palace,' she said, with a nervous laugh. 'I go by the electric train from Victoria. Mr. Grayne's fetching me from Norwood in his car.'

'I see,' said Maurice.

If anybody had told him that he was jealous—that he rather resented this new friendship which was springing up between Judy and Bart Grayne—he would have denied it strenuously. Nevertheless, he was not particularly pleased about it.

He hailed a passing taxi, put Judy in it, and took his place beside her. In silence they drove up Fleet Street and the Strand, through Leicester Square, to the Piccadilly.

When they were seated in the crowded lounge of the hotel, waiting for the two dry Martinis which Maurice had ordered, Judy tried to relieve the embarrassing situation by talking animatedly about the *Daily World* and the interesting life she led as a typist.

But Maurice only listened to that for a few moments, then, fixing his gaze gravely upon her, said:

'Judy, I haven't brought you here to talk about the *Daily*

World. I really don't care a damn whether a million copies of it sell per day or not. I want to talk about you. You snubbed me so unmercifully on the phone a few weeks ago, it's taken me some time to make up my mind to approach you again! But I felt to-day that we must have a talk.'

She looked down at the bag in her lap. It gave him a chance to notice the amazing length and thickness of those lashes which had always attracted him. But she was unconscious of his scrutiny.

'I don't think I shall make a very entertaining subject for a discussion, Maurice,' she said.

'My dear, why treat me like this? As though we were mere acquaintances about to enjoy a cocktail, but not really in the least interested in each other.'

'Well—are we?'

'Judy, you're being stubborn. Why?'

She looked up at him now, biting her lips till they showed quite white.

'I don't see the use of a personal discussion. We had it all out in your flat the other day.'

'You ran away before it was ended.'

'I wish I'd run away before this began.'

'Why do you hate me so much? Once you were very kind——'

'Too kind, perhaps.'

He winced, and took out his cigarette-case and looked at it gloomily. Empty. He must get a packet of cigarettes when the waiter came back.

'You're quite right about that. You were—much too kind—but you needn't tell me that. I've realised it—worried about it for days and nights.'

'Are we going to have this remorse business again?' she asked with a jarring little laugh. She knew that she was being beastly. That she was hurting him. Quite obviously his contrition was sincere. But it was because she loved him so much that she was trying to be flippant in order to keep the situation from becoming dramatic. She was so afraid that

Maurice was going to apologise again. That would be like rubbing salt into an open wound.

'Look here, Judy,' he said, snapping his case together, 'don't let's get all distorted and unreasonable about this show. You ran away before I had time to really talk to you. It wasn't very fair of you.'

'And it isn't fair of you to keep referring to it,' she said mutinously. 'I want to forget it. I've told you so. The thing happened, but it's over and done with now.'

The waiter brought the cocktails. Maurice ordered a packet of cigarettes. He drank half the cocktail before he spoke to Judy again. She was making everything so exceedingly difficult. She wasn't the easy, malleable Judy of old days. She said that the thing had happened, and was over and done with now. But was it? She seemed to dislike him—her one wish was to ignore him, avoid him. He was not surprised. He had done everything to make her hate him. Yet it was impossible to wipe out the memory of the Judy who had been so kind—so much too sweet and kind—so unforgettable for any man.

He could not yet understand himself or his own changed emotions concerning her, but he did know that it was going to hurt him badly if she meant to erect a stone wall between them—a wall behind which she would hide herself from him for ever.

'Judy,' at length he said, 'wouldn't it be easier for both of us if we discussed things like friends?'

Bright-eyed, tight lipped, she answered:

'Yes, of course. We've always been friends, haven't we? But perhaps it's a little difficult now—I mean we might find it better to go our own separate ways.'

'Judy, when I asked you to marry me the other day—I meant it.'

'I know you did. It was very decent of you. But I also meant it when I said "No." '

'You really do hate me.'

'Why do you keep harping on that?' She had to clench her

hands very tightly, but she was quite surprised and pleased with her control. 'It isn't a question of disliking you. I don't. But I just can't marry you. You're so ridiculous, Maurice. Behaving like a rejected suitor who feels his life will be quite ruined because a girl turns him down——' She broke off with a flippant laugh.

His very blue eyes looked at her sombrely. He felt suddenly sore and angry with her—with life—and most of all with himself. He didn't quite see why he should allow this girl's existence to trouble him so—why he should feel so desperately anxious to make her marry him, whether she wanted it or not. Why must life do these rotten, perverse things to one? Why didn't the memory, the thought of Carol, matter any more? But it was as though that other love had been a boy's infatuation, which had burnt up and flickered out. But it was a man's passion and intensity which had impelled him toward Judy and made him take her with him, relentlessly, across the boundary line.

Anyhow, he resented Judy's flippant attitude. It destroyed his own sense of humour.

Then Judy said, more gravely:

'Sorry. I didn't meant to be quite so beastly.'

'You've every reason to be.'

'Well, look here, Maurice, it's such a fruitless discussion anyhow. What about Carol?'

Maurice lit his cigarette and smoked in silence for an instant. Then he said quietly:

'I'm not going to marry Carol, Judy.'

'Why?'

'We're both agreed that we don't want to marry.'

'But that's absurd.' She stared at him, her pulses quickening. 'You can't have stopped caring for Carol, and she's free to marry you—I mean, I saw Uncle Charles a few weeks ago and he told me about poor Dr. Maddison.'

'That's so,' said Maurice uneasily. 'Carol told me about it. It's tough luck for her. But it doesn't mean that she and I have got to get married, does it?'

Judy sat very still. She thought that she understood. It was this conscience of Maurice's—his feeling that he must marry *her* because of the other night. Quite definitely she was coming between him and Carol again. He was being frightfully nice about it—really rather chivalrous. But she wasn't going to let his chivalry stand in the way of his and Carol's happiness. She must settle it for good and all.

If she could have given Maurice her hand and felt the warm clasp of his fingers, and known that she would feel his arms about her once again, it would have changed the face of the world for her. But she must renounce him finally. This should really be the last time that they met. Later—a long way ahead—perhaps she would be able to face him without the wild thrill that tore her heart in shreds now when she looked at him. She wondered, desolately, how long it would take for that feeling to die in her. And she thought how empty and sterile life would seem once it had died.

'Maurice,' she said, 'what you and Carol do doesn't matter much to me. But so far as *I* am concerned, I want you to know for good and all that I do *not* intend to marry you.'

He stared at her.

'You really mean that?'

'Yes,' she said steadily.

And she thought:

'I was the cause of Carol losing him first, and now she's lost Grant Maddison she must find her happiness with Maurice again. If I drop out of it, the tangle will unravel itself between those two.'

'Judy,' said Maurice, 'if it isn't impertinent, is there any other fellow? I mean, if you care for somebody—naturally I won't stand in the way. I couldn't bear to think I'd done you any lasting harm. But, after all, it's your own secret—you mustn't let it spoil things if there's someone else——' He broke off, stammering. Judy's face was scarlet to the roots of her hair. And then suddenly, with one of her impulses, she broke out:

'Well, I *am* in love with somebody—terribly, madly in

love. I admit it. Somebody I'd die for. Now please leave me alone.'

An instant's frozen silence. Judy, watching Maurice's features slowly harden, thought:

'Oh, *why* doesn't he realise that it's himself?' And then told herself that she was thankful to heaven that he didn't.

Maurice was thinking:

'Well, that's one in the eye for me. Straight from the shoulder. I didn't realise that she was in love with anybody. I suppose it's Grayne. I quite understand. He was married to her best friend, and one day she'll get married to him and console him.'

All quite simple and ordinary. But his emotions were most unhappy and complex. For he was not a man who had loved promiscuously or often, and the memory of what Judy had been to him was not one that could rest lightly on him. All her sweetness had been his. Her wonderful capacity for loving, for comforting a man when he was down and out—her marvellous generosity—that had all been for him. And he knew, in his heart of hearts, that he would find the thought of her in another man's possession more than unpalatable.

But it was up to him now to behave as decently as possible and fade out of the picture, which was what she appeared to want.

'I'm terribly sorry, my dear,' he said gently. 'I hadn't the smallest notion that you cared for anybody—that way. Now that I know it, you can rely on me not to worry you any further. I can only ask you to forgive me and let us part friends.'

That speech very nearly unnerved Judy. She hung perilously on the fine edge of things—of breaking down and saying:

'Don't go. I don't want you to leave me. There isn't anybody else, and never has been. Oh, Maurice, my darling, don't go!'

But that would have spoiled everything, and so she only said:

'Of course we'll be friends, and you needn't ask me to forgive you—I did you and Carol a great wrong in the first instance—we can cry quits, can't we?'

He flushed hotly, gave one quick look at her, and then rose to his feet.

'You're always too damn generous, Judy. You fill me with shame. But I think we understand each other now. Look here, oughtn't you to get along to Victoria, and catch your train?'

She walked with him out of the Piccadilly and stood silently on the pavement beside him while the commissionaire hailed a taxi. Her heart was sinking and her courage flagging so low that she felt it was just as well that Maurice had cut short their conversation. In another moment she knew she was going to burst into tears and give the whole show away.

He had never been more attractive to her than when he held out his hand now, and with a boyish, apologetic smile said:

'You're rather a splendid person, Judy. I shall never forget you. I'd like to think you're going to be very happy with this fellow.'

She was quite inarticulate, but her small gloved fingers clung to his for an instant. Happy with the other fellow! Oh, heavens, if only he knew!

'You and Carol must fix things up again,' she said and managed to smile. 'You've been seeing her, haven't you?'

'Yes,' said Maurice.

The whole thing was baffling him—beyond him. When Carol had phoned and told him that she was never going to see Grant Maddison again, and that she would like to have a long talk with him, he had felt nothing but embarrassment—and that embarrassment had persisted when he was actually with her. She had been especially charming to him, but the memory of Judy had, in his own mind at least, formed an impassable barrier between Carol and himself.

Judy climbed into the taxi. Maurice raised his hat.

'Good-bye—and good luck; and if you ever want me——'

'Thanks,' whispered Judy.

The commissionaire slammed the door. Just before the taxi moved away, she took a last look at Maurice and felt that the world was ending. Then she was borne swiftly away from him through the congestion of traffic. She sat back in a dark corner and hid her face in her hands.

CHAPTER 16

At the end of six months, Judy was more or less an expert typist and—so Bart Grayne and Janet Waller told her—invaluable as under-secretary in the literary editor's office. And, because it was her nature to take an interest in anything that she did, she flung herself whole-heartedly into the job.

Perhaps she worked even harder than she would have done under normal conditions, because she did not want to give herself too much time for thinking and brooding over the past.

That past in which Maurice had played so important a part was, so far as she was concerned, over and done with. But the thing went on hurting—like an internal wound that wouldn't heal. Concentration on her work was the one possible anodyne, but she found, nevertheless, that far too much of her leisure time was spent in the thought of Maurice. The incessant ache of remembrance—the longing to see him again—never left her.

She had always led a healthy, open-air life down at Selsey. The restrictions of London, and the long hours of office routine, did not particularly suit her. But it was not until the end of August that she really began to suffer in health. Apart from the fact that London life did not suit her, these summer months, so saturated with her heart's pain, had been a heavy strain. All her youth and courage could not save her from the inevitable collapse.

August was a particularly trying month. The heat seemed unbearably oppressive in Fleet Street, and, at the end of the day's rush in the *Daily World* office, Judy felt like a limp rag. The Wallers' little house in Norwood was not much cooler, and she lost her appetite completely. She was losing weight at quite an alarming rate.

Bart Grayne, now her most devoted friend, and wonderfully good to her, took her out and tried to amuse her when he could. But he was, himself, suffering from acute depression that summer, unable to stamp out his abiding grief for his young wife, so there was not much help that he could give to Judy, when he, himself, needed help so badly.

Absorbed in his own sorrow, Bart was not the one to notice that Judy had grown incredibly thin and had lost all those lovely young curves which had been the heritage of health and youth when she had first come up from Selsey.

It was Janet Waller who worried about Judy. The child was all eyes; heading for a breakdown, in Janet's estimation. But, when she implored her to eat more and rest more, Judy only assured her that she must have something to do and that idleness bored her. As for losing weight, she laughed that off. When she took in another inch of a skirt she only said:

'I shall soon by quite fashionable. The Hollywood eighteen-day diet isn't in it!'

But Miss Waller was not deceived by Judy's show of courage. She was secretly fretting, and Janet knew it and would have given much to be able to help her. It was more than she dared do, to question Judy too closely. Any interrogation about her private affairs made Judy retire at once into her shell. So Miss Waller was left to watch and worry and feel herself impotent. But there was scarcely a night that summer when she did not go to bed haunted by the expression in Judy's eyes, which were abnormally large, and the small sweet face which had lost all its bright gipsy colouring.

Janet poured her troubles into her mother's ears.

'Some fellow's done something to that kid. I wish I knew who he was, so that I could tell him what I think of him.

What foul brutes men are! That kid's as generous-hearted as anyone I know. Someone's taken advantage of it. It doesn't pay for a girl to be generous—the gold-diggers get the best time——' And the usual avalanche of Janet's 'bromides.'

Old Mrs. Waller, frail and placid and past worrying about anything in particular, had only one answer to all her cherished daughter's cryptic remarks and opinions.

'That's right, dearie—that's right!'

Janet knew that it was right. But it didn't bring her any nearer to solving Judy's problem.

Judy received a number of invitations from her uncle to go down to Grey Chesters for the week-end, but she could not bring herself to accept. Pride forbade it, and, apart from pride, she really did not want to go down to Selsey and the family. The memory of Maurice was so directly connected with them all.

The fact that no news reached her of a renewal of the engagement between Maurice and Carol was one of Judy's biggest worries. She could not understand what was happening between those two, and could not really find out. But it seemed quite definite that they had not contemplated marriage. In Judy's estimation there were a number of possible reasons for this delay. Carol might still doubt Maurice—or, on the other hand, she might really have transferred her affections to Grant Maddison and be unable to get back to the old footing with Maurice. Judy was sure that it had nothing to do with Maurice himself. He could not be worrying about her, Judy, for instance. She had told him quite definitely that evening, at the Piccadilly, that there was no need for him to consider himself in any way pledged to her. She had even convinced him that she was in love with somebody else.

When Judy dwelt on the thought of Maurice and Carol she felt utterly wretched. She could only reproach herself continually for having done irremediable harm to them both. She had so hoped that they would come together again—particularly for Maurice's sake she had hoped it. That it would hurt

her incredibly to imagine Maurice as Carol's lover and husband she did not doubt. But she was prepared for that. And she knew that she had not even the right to resent it. But this present position, when nothing seemed to transpire, was more worrying to Judy than anything.

The most recent news she had of Maurice came from Kink.

Dear old Kink, still at Barts, had made strenuous efforts to see Judy again, that summer, and finally succeeded. And when he came to call upon her, and brought with him a very attractive girl who was training at the hospital, Judy felt that she need no longer hesitate about seeing Kink again. It was the old, brotherly Kink who approached her—a little sheepish, but quite definitely in love with his pretty nurse, whom he called Dorothy, and who had the loveliest red hair and whitest skin Judy had ever seen.

Quite often now these two, on the verge of an engagement, called at the Wallers' house and insisted upon taking Judy out 'n Kink's car; generally on a Saturday or Sunday. They were both charming to her, and Judy loved to see them, but even the sight of Kink was too painfully associated in her mind with Maurice to allow her to be really happy in his society. Added to which, she did not want to be a third when she knew that the pair—despite the warmth of their invitations—were absorbed in each other, and must prefer to be alone.

Kink told her that Maurice had now taken a flat of his own, somewhere in Chelsea, facing the river; his friend Lister having returned to London and the flat in St. John's Court. Judy felt that never again could she hear St. John's Court mentioned without a tight feeling in her throat and red-hot pain in her heart.

Kink had not seen Maurice, himself, lately, but Carol—apparently—met him sometimes.

Carol, according to Kink, had hinted several times in the home circle that things might in time come right between herself and her former lover. Beyond that, Kink knew no more than anybody else. But it seemed to Judy inevitable that those two *must* eventually find happiness with each other.

It was while Bart Grayne was away on a fortnight's holiday up in Scotland with his in-laws that Judy went suddenly to pieces. She had been typing 'answers to correspondents' for about an hour, one sultry afternoon towards the end of August. The next thing that happened was that everything went quite dark, and she toppled quite quietly out of her chair on to the office floor.

She recovered consciousness to find Janet Waller kneeling beside her, her large plain face white with concern, and Ed, the office-boy, standing beside her with a cup of tea and the inevitably slopped biscuits in either hand.

'Coo—she do look queer,' was young Edward's remark, and the first words that Judy heard.

Then Judy sat up, feeling very sick, and said:

'I'm all right—let me get back to work——'

But it was a very long time before Judy was destined to use that typewriter again. She insisted upon getting back into her chair, in spite of Janet Waller's protests, and then quietly fainted again. After that she had only a dim recollection of being driven all the way back to Norwood in a very nice car which belonged to the man who was doing the literary editor's work while Bart was away.

That night Judy was very ill. The doctor who was called in hastily by Mrs. Waller and Janet, who were both shocked and scared by Judy's condition, called it a nervous breakdown.

'Obviously she hasn't been eating enough,' was her verdict upon Judy. 'There isn't any flesh on that young woman's bones, and I should say she's been suffering from some kind of mental strain. Am I right?'

'I think you are,' said Janet Waller with feeling.

'Well, she'll want very careful nursing, and no worries of any sort,' he said, 'and the sooner she can get out of London the better.'

Judy, in bed, sleeping now like one utterly exhausted both mentally and physically, knew and cared nothing of what was being said about her or planned for her. She was so tired—so very, very tired. Nothing seemed to matter any more. Even

the long pain of remembering about Maurice was in abeyance. She just wanted to sleep—drift right out on a nameless tide which would carry her out somewhere to a place where there would be complete oblivion.

Janet Waller, being a woman of sense and action, took it upon herself to send a telegram to her employer.

'Judy Farrell dangerously ill nervous breakdown what shall I do. Waller.'

The answer came from Edinburgh before midnight:

'Coming back at once. Grayne.'

Before another twenty-four hours elapsed, Bart Grayne had broken into his holiday and come back south, conscious of a very real anxiety for the girl who had been his wife's friend and for whom he now cherished a personal affection.

Judy was much too ill by that time to care who was with her, or why. But when Bart Grayne stood beside her and noticed how painfully sharpened was the outline of that small face and how desperately ill she looked, his heart misgave him. It might have been his Nome lying there, ill and helpless. But Nome would have got better—if he and his love could have helped her. For whom had this child, Judy, to make the effort? He, perhaps even better than Janet Waller, knew and understood what Judy's condition of mind had been these last six months. Judy had always been reticent in what she had told him, but he was well aware of the existence of Maurice Fairvill and of her hopeless love for him. It struck Bart, even while he stood there at her bedside, anxiously watching, that she might never get better unless she had the will to do so.

Something must be done about it, and, although he felt himself to be in a difficult position, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

First of all he telephoned for Colonel Riverson. The

Colonel, startled by what Bart Grayne had to say, rushed up to London and brought his wife with him.

Mrs. Riverson was a hard woman, and she had been particularly hard about Judy. But, during the six months which had elapsed since Judy's departure from Grey Chesters, the affair had more or less simmered down. Everybody seemed convinced that Judy was not as bad as she had made herself out to be, and even Violet Riverson had her soft moments. If Judy was seriously ill, then she must be taken care of by someone, and, as she was the only woman relative whom Judy possessed, it was up to her to wipe out the past.

Mrs. Riverson was definitely shocked when she saw how Judy had changed and how ill the child really was. The Colonel was, like most men, not very helpful on these occasions, so it was Mrs. Riverson who took command from that hour onward.

Neither she nor Janet Waller were prepared to like each other, and they were frankly antagonistic when they met. Janet was neither the type nor class for whom Mrs Riverson had any understanding, and Janet, who had heard quite a lot about Judy's 'Auntie Vi,' thought her an unpleasant, domineering woman. But for Judy's sake she stood back and allowed Mrs. Riverson to take over the reins.

Judy was removed by ambulance to a nursing-home in Manchester Street, which Kink—as worried as any of them—had arranged. It was a beautiful home, run by a man from Barts whom Kink knew very well, and where the terms would be lowered to meet the Riversons' purse.

Judy had had a bad night, with a high temperature which had made her delirious and beaten down her powers of resistance. Without knowing what she did, she called, agonisedly, for Maurice. She called for him when the ambulance men were carrying her out of her bedroom.

Janet had to go, grimly, to her post at the office, feeling broken-hearted because she knew that she would come back to a home emptied of her cherished friend, but the Riversons

and Bart Grayne were present when Judy was taken away.

Fortunately, Colonel and Mrs. Riverson were outside on the pavement, talking to the ambulance driver, when Judy uttered those piteous cries for Maurice. It was Bart Grayne and the nurse, who heard them. It meant nothing to the nurse, but Bart, holding one of Judy's hot little hands in his as he went carefully down the stairs beside the stretcher drew in his lips and thought:

'So that's it—it's that fellow—and, my God! he's going to know it!'

The doctor had given Judy an injection, and she was quiet when they got her into the ambulance. She remembered nothing of the journey across London to the nursing-home; remembered nothing, in fact, until she opened her eyes very late that night and found herself in a strange, dim room, and a strange bed, and there was a uniformed nurse standing beside her, taking her pulse. She was too weak to do anything but whisper:

'Where am I?'

The nurse told her, and added that she must just go to sleep and not worry about anything.

Then two great tears rolled down Judy's cheeks and she shut her eyes and tried not to think. It seemed to her that she had come back from a long journey, and that on that journey Maurice had been with her, holding her hand. Then he had pushed her away, sneered at her, and vanished, and she had tried desperately to find him again and failed. But of course that was only a nightmare. In a half-doped condition, her control broken, she began to cry. The nurse could do nothing to calm her, and later telephoned for the doctor who was taking over the case.

Judy, only half conscious, felt a cool hand on her forehead, heard a man's voice asking her gently why she was crying. She heard herself answer:

'It's about—the other night——'

'What night?'

'The other night,' she repeated, and sobbed piteously. 'Oh,

it doesn't matter—I don't want you to think that it matters—only please don't keep referring to the other night!'

The man's voice said:

'That's all right—I won't. Go to sleep!'

After that something pricked her arm, and she cried out 'Oh!' and then drifted back into the shadows. She seemed to go on another long journey. Again Maurice was with her, holding on to her hand. This time he was smiling at her very gaily. They seemed to fly through space. She went first, and he caught her up and put an arm around her and said:

'How sweet you are, Judy!'

That made her tremendously happy, and she knew that nothing could hurt her or worry her any more.

The nurse in charge of Miss Farrell looked at the white face of her patient, then turned back to the doctor, satisfied.

'She seems happier now. She's smiling.'

'A curious case. Complete collapse,' the doctor remarked in a low voice as he walked out of the room with Judy's nurse. 'Rather interesting—and rather tragic. She looks such a child. I wonder what's at the back of it all?'

Kink was downstairs. He had obstinately refused to go back to his rooms until he was certain that Judy was all right. His friend, Dr. Starboard, the physician who ran this home and was in charge of Judy's case, said a few reassuring words to him.

'She's had another injection—she'll be all right to-night, anyhow. I should get along home and not worry, old chap.'

'Kink's fair, boyish face, which had been puckered with worry, cleared.

'Well, thank God for that. Still, she isn't any too good, is she?'

'She's got something on her mind,' said Starboard. 'We must try and find out what it is and see if we can help her.'

Janet Waller was the first to call at the home that next morning. Her loyal and affectionate heart overflowed with anxiety for her friend. She spent much more than she could afford on a large bunch of flowers, and sent it up to Judy

with her love. She was told that nobody would be allowed to see her for some days.

Not even Judy's uncle or aunt were allowed to visit her. Dr. Starboard was adamant. Judy needed absolute rest and quiet if she were going to get better. It was more than the lives of the nurses were worth to allow a visitor to pass the threshold of Number 5, which was Judy's room.

Mrs. Riverson decided that she and the Colonel had better not go back to Selsey until Judy was well enough to see them. Of course, when she left the home she must go straight down to Grey Chesters. After that they could discuss her future.

Carol would doubtless have joined in the general rally round Judy's bedside, but, at the time of Judy's breakdown, Carol was away. She had gone down to Devonshire to stay with friends.

Bart Grayne waited twenty-four hours until Judy was installed in the nursing-home, and then took it upon himself to acquaint Maurice Fairvill with the news.

He knew perfectly well that it rarely pays to interfere in other people's lives, but it had been given to him to probe a little into Judy's secret tragedy and he knew that Maurice was the only person who could help her now. He did not know Maurice except for that chance meeting outside the office several months ago, neither had he any clear idea as to what the position really was between Maurice and Judy. He only knew that Judy had expected Maurice to marry her cousin, Carol Riverson, and that the marriage had not yet come off.

He telephoned to the head office of the Far East Tea Company and asked for Mr. Fairvill.

He was switched on to Maurice's office. The conversation between the two men was typically brief and undramatic.

'Grayne speaking,' said Bart. 'You know who I mean?—Grayne from the *Daily World*.'

'Of course I know,' said Maurice. 'Anything I can do for you?'

'It's this,' said Bart. 'Miss Farrell is very ill—and I thought perhaps you ought to know.'

Then Maurice's voice changed.

'Judy's ill—how ill?'

'Pretty bad. Some sort of nervous breakdown. Her relations are looking after her. I sent for Colonel Riverson.'

'Would you please tell me where she is?' from Maurice.

Bart gave him the address of the nursing-home.

'It's very decent of you to have phoned me,' said Maurice. 'I don't suppose she'll want to see me—but——'

Then Bart cut in rather shortly:

'That's where you're wrong.'

An instant's silence. Then Maurice said:

'Did she ask to see me?'

'Yes. But she's much too ill to remember it.'

'I don't quite understand,' came from Maurice. 'But I'll go along at once, and thanks very much.'

That was all. Bart Grayne hung up the receiver, sat back in his chair, and stared in a worried way at Judy's empty seat. The office wasn't the same without her; and Janet Waller was sniffing as though she had one of her bad colds. But he knew that it wasn't only a cold that accounted for the red-rimmed eyes and tortured nasal organ of the excellent Miss Waller.

'Now I wonder what the devil that fellow Fairvill has in his mind,' he thought, 'and whether I've done the right thing in telling him to go and see Judy. I don't suppose I have. But I can't quite forget the way she called for him when she was on that stretcher—poor little thing.'

And then he sighed heavily and fell to thinking of Nome, and what she had looked like when they had lifted her out of the wreckage at Grantham that ghastly day.

'Life's bloody hell,' he thought savagely, '*bloody hell!* Perhaps those who are out of it are best off. Nome, my dear, it's going to seem a long time before I can come and find you again. . . .'

Down in Leadenhall Street, a man came at top speed out of the offices of the Far East Tea Company, sprang into a taxi, and gave the address of a nursing-home in Manchester Street.

CHAPTER 17

THE midday sun was beating remorselessly down upon a gasping London when Judy first became really conscious of where she was and what had been happening to her.

It was remarkably cool in her room. The windows were open wide, and green blinds kept out the glare of the August sunshine. Judy, feeling ridiculously weak, and a little sick from the effects of the dope which they had given her, lay motionless for a long time, staring around her. She had only a dim recollection of being told that she was in a nursing-home, and a slightly clearer one of her fainting fit at the office.

She had never been really ill in her life before. It all seemed rather queer and frightening. But she still felt so infinitely tired and languid that it was pleasant to lie here and feel that she need not move or speak.

It was a pleasant little room with white furniture, a dark green carpet, and green striped curtains. Painfully neat and speckless, after the fashion of nursing-homes. Judy wondered where the glorious flowers had come from. A great bunch of red roses by her bedside; carnations in a tall vase on the mantelpiece; and a brilliant, vari-coloured mass of zinnias on a table near the window. She particularly loved zinnias, and her gaze rested on them with satisfaction.

Then she began to wonder on whose authority she had been brought to this place, and what was really the matter

with her. Finally her thoughts turned to Maurice. It was inevitable that she should think of him, and her pleasant languor was replaced by the old nagging pain in her heart. Where was Maurice? What was he doing? Was he engaged to Carol yet? Did he ever think of her? No—why should he? Would he hear that she was ill, and, if he did, would he care?

The door opened very quietly. A fresh-faced young nurse in dark blue dress and spotless white cap and apron tiptoed to the bedside.

'Ah! So you're awake.'

Cool fingers took her pulse and a professional eye was fixed upon a very professional watch.

'Are you my nurse?' said Judy, and felt that it was ridiculous that her voice should sound so small and weak.

'I am your day-nurse—yes.'

'Please tell me what's the matter with me. Who brought me here?'

'Oh, you're very much better, my dear,' said a voice which was meant to reassure. 'Just a little breakdown—I think you've been working much too hard, haven't you?'

'No,' whispered Judy.

'Well, well—worrying a little too much, perhaps. Anyhow, there's nothing whatsoever for you to worry about now. You've got to just stay very quiet and make up your mind to get quite well. You came by ambulance yesterday from Norwood. Colonel and Mrs. Riverson—aren't they your aunt and uncle?—are looking after you.'

Judy stared before her.

'I see. Uncle Charles and Auntie Vi—I suppose—Janet sent for them.'

'If you mean Janet Waller—that lovely bunch of zinnias came from Miss Janet Waller early this morning.'

Judy thought how like Janet it was to have remembered her passion for zinnias. Dear old Janet—she must have searched London before she found them.

'All sorts of people have been enquiring after you and looking after you,' said her nurse with a smile. 'Your nice

cousin from Barts—he's a medical student and a friend of Dr. Starboard's, isn't he? And then there's Mr. Grayne—would you like to see the card that came with those roses?'

Judy took the card in fingers which felt stupidly incapable. It was quite certain that she could not have typed this morning. She read what was written:

'Get well soon, Judy dear, and never do this again—Bart.'

Judy swallowed hard. Everybody had been amazingly kind. She felt overcome. The nurse, moving about the room doing little odd jobs, went on talking in her pleasant fashion:

'Aren't your carnations glorious? Your aunt and uncle sent them in.'

Judy looked at the carnations. So even Auntie Vi was waving the olive-branch! She seemed to have been strangely kind and friendly. It was rather nice. Judy hated quarrelling with anyone. She closed her eyes for a moment and wished that she did not feel so appallingly weak. And she wished, too, that she had not been stupid enough to hope that some of those flowers had come from Maurice. Why should Maurice send her flowers? What did it matter to him whether she lived or died?

Somebody tapped on the door. The nurse left the room. There was another nurse outside in the passage.

'Is Number 5 awake?'

'Yes. Just woken up this minute. I'm going to get her something to drink.'

'There's a visitor for her. The one matron said should be allowed to come up. Dr. Starboard's orders.'

Judy's day-nurse, who had heard one or two interesting things from Judy's night-nurse, smiled and nodded:

'Ah-ha—I suppose that's the Maurice she kept calling for. Bring him up. But I'm sure he oughtn't to stay long—she's as weak as a kitten.'

When Judy opened her eyes again, she felt quite sure that she was having another of those strange dreams. For Maurice Fairvill was coming across her room; the same brown-faced, blue-eyed Maurice who was so immensely dear to her: and looking as awkward and self-conscious as a schoolboy. He carried an enormous bunch of carnations in his hands. She looked at him dazedly. He looked back at her, and for a moment neither of them spoke.

Maurice was aghast at the change in Judy. Where was the starry-eyed, pink-cheeked Judy of the passionate, impulsive heart? The Judy who was all soft curves, red lips, gay, challenging smiles? This was a Judy whom he did not know and could hardly bear to look at. So white was she that the linen pillow-case on which the small dark head was resting looked scarcely whiter; even the generous lips were drained of colour and her eyes were enormous and shadowy. The long lashes looked too heavy for the languid lids. She wore blue linen pyjamas with short sleeves, which showed him how thin her arms had grown. And there was a hollow in her throat which he did not remember.

He had had no idea that she was so ill, and he was certain that it was not only the breakdown of the last twenty-four hours which had so altered her.

Surely he was not responsible for this? He hoped to God that he wasn't. How could he be? Hadn't she told him that there was somebody that she cared for? What, then, was the matter? Then his thoughts broke off abruptly. The nurse placed a chair at the bedside, took the flowers from him, and said in her breezy way:

'Shall I put these lovely things in water?'

She vanished tactfully, and Maurice and Judy were alone.

Judy wanted to be very calm and ordinary, and to conceal the fact that her heart throbbed so wildly at the sight of him that her whole body was shaking. But sheer physical weakness broke down the defences that she had been trying to build up against the thought of this man during the last six

months. The tears sprang to her eyes and rolled silently down her cheeks. Dumbly she held out a hand.

Maurice took the small feverish hand and put it against his cheek. He was conscious of a more poignant emotion that he had ever known in his life. The sight of her there, so changed, so weak, and in tears—Judy, who was bravest of the brave—completely unnerved him. He said in a husky voice:

'Judy—my dear—what's all this about? What a fright you've given me—you've scared us all to death. What does it mean?'

She could only whisper:

'I—don't—know.'

He pressed the small hand closer against his warm cheek. The scarred cheek. Through the blinding tears she noticed that scar, and the tears went on dripping slowly down her face because she could not help herself.

'You mustn't cry,' he said, and took out a big brown silk handkerchief and wiped away the tears very gently, whereupon she smiled. The smile wrenched him more than the tears had done, because her face was all screwed up and made her look like a child making a valiant effort at control.

'Maurice,' she said in her weak little voice, 'oh, *Maurice*——'

And then, because he found it impossible to do otherwise, he moved on to the side of her bed, slipped both arms under her, and kissed her hair quite recklessly.

'My dear!' he whispered. 'My poor dear!'

Judy, equally reckless—feeling that she didn't care what the result of this moment would be, and swept away by an overwhelming longing to respond to his unexpected embrace—put her arms around his neck and held on to him with all the strength that she could muster.

For a long while they stayed like that without speaking. He was horrified to find how slight she had grown—how much too thin. He did not know why she clung to him with such passion when she cared for somebody else. He only knew that

he wanted to hold her thus, and that he was amazingly glad to have her in his arms again. It was no good ignoring plain facts or shirking the issue of that strange episode which had been the outcome of his bitterness and of her remorse six months ago. That night with Judy had bred in him a lasting passion. And the subequent days and nights apart from her had proved to him that she meant more than Carol could ever mean, and that he had fallen in love with her—which was not at all as it should have been. He had punished her, and in the end his had been the greater punishment. The need of her, and his unceasing wish to see her again, had not lessened in the long months. But he had kept away because she had made it plain to him, when they had had that last cocktail together, that she did not want to see him again.

It was strange and rather bitter now, when he held her close to him, loathing himself for the cad that he had been, and adoring her for her adorable generosity, to feel that there could be no happy solution to the problem. But he found himself breaking through his own reserve and asking her, openly, why she turned to him in this fasion. There could be no need for her generosity to-day.

'They said that you wanted me—why –why?' he asked her huskily. 'I can't understand—I wonder you let me come near you. Judy, what does it all mean? You told me that you were desperately in love with another man——'

She drew away from his arms and lay back on the pillow, flushed and panting with sheer weakness. The tears went on flowing, and she could not lie to him now.

'It wasn't true.'

He folded her right hand closely in both of his.

'I can't understand,' he repeated. 'Why did you tell me that?'

'I wanted you to go away.'

'But why?'

'Because I knew that it was hopeless——'

'What was hopeless? Darling child, I really don't understand——'

Her heart seemed to break all over again at the sound of his voice calling her 'darling child'—just as he had done that night in Lister's flat. She began to sob:

'You belong to Carol—oh, go away—it isn't fair—don't make me explain—can't you see I haven't any pride left?'

He stared down at her. It dawned on him suddenly what she meant, and he felt his heart leap like a live thing.

'My God! you can't mean—Judy—it isn't *me* you care for? How can it be?'

She sobbed wildly:

'You know it is—you *know*! How could it be anyone else? Oh, go away—please——'

But Maurice's eyes were very blue and very bright, and there was a queer little smile on his lips as he gently put both arms around her again.

'Go away? Not I, my dear. If you care a damn about me, I shall never leave you again. Judy, don't you realise that I love *you*, my dear? Darling little idiot, don't you understand that I fell in love with you quite madly after—that night? I admit that I wasn't in love with you when I first asked you to marry me. But I knew it later on. I knew it that night you sent me away, and made me utterly miserable because I thought you cared for Bart Grayne.'

Judy stopped crying. Trembling and in silence she lay against his heart and tried to realise the full significance of what he was telling her. She could scarcely believe it was true. Maurice—in love with her—that didn't sound possible. Miracles didn't happen in this mundane world. She felt his fingers smoothing the hair back from her forehead and his lips touching her wet lashes and flushed, wet cheeks.

'You don't care that way for Grayne?' he asked. 'Do you?'

'No,' she whispered. 'Of course not. There's never been anybody but you.'

'Darling,' he said, 'there's never going to be anybody again for me but you—that is, if you'll marry me. You ought to

have married me six months ago. We've wasted a hell of a lot of time. You don't know how I've hated myself and wanted you.'

'I can't believe it.'

'I swear to God it's true.'

'But, Carol——' she said weakly.

'My dear, when Carol and I had dinner together about a fortnight ago, we came to the conclusion that it wasn't any good trying to revive the old feeling. We did try—but it wasn't any good. She'd lost it, and so had I, and we couldn't find it again. But she doesn't seem to mind very much. And if you're standing back because of Carol—you're all wrong. Things have just happened that way. It's a queer thing, but Judy, sweetheart—when you took my future wife away from me last Christmas you gave me something much more precious—yourself. I don't think Carol and I would ever have been really happy. But I know that you and I will be—that is, if you will marry me.'

After that Judy could not argue any more. She could only raise her face and whisper:

'Maurice—Maurice—I love you so. Darling Maurice, I do love you.'

'God knows why,' he said. 'I don't deserve it. But I love you more than I've loved anybody in my life.'

A little while later Maurice was turned out of the home because he was told that he had stayed quite long enough. He ran into three people on the front-door step. Colonel and Mrs. Riverson and Kink. They exchanged greetings. Mrs. Riverson was a little frigid, but Maurice shook her hand warmly and seemed in such a state of excitement and enthusiasm that she was forced to climb down.

'My dear Maurice, and why have *you* been allowed to see Judy? I thought that Dr. Starboard wouldn't let her see anybody—even ourselves——'

'Perhaps I'm privileged,' said Maurice. 'You see, Judy and I are going to be married as soon as she's fit enough to get away from this home.'

'Good Lord!' exclaimed Kink.

'God bless my soul!' said the Colonel.

'Well, *really*!' exclaimed Mrs. Riverson. 'I think all you young people behave in the most *extraordinary* way.'

'I'd no idea that Judy—that you—anyhow, jolly good luck, old chap,' said Kink, stammering a little.

'Engagements are in the air,' said the Colonel, shaking his head as though he were not quite certain of the wisdom of the proceedings. 'Kink broke it to us last night that he's engaged to a nurse at the hospital, and this morning we had a letter from Carol to say that she's met some marvellous hunting man down in Devonshire. That girl of mine never knows her own mind from one day to another—I've given her up as a bad job.'

'Well, is Judy better?' Kink asked Maurice. 'That's all that really matters.'

'I think,' said Maurice, 'that she's a good deal better. I hope so, anyhow. I'm just going along to the *Daily World* —she wants me to see Grayne and that friend who's been so good to her—Miss Waller.'

'I'll walk down to the Underground with you,' said Kink, and left his somewhat mystified parents to go into the home.

Upstairs, in Room Number 5, Judy watched the nurse arrange Maurice's carnations in a vase. She was propped up with pillows and drinking chicken-broth. She still felt absurdly weak, but it didn't seem to matter, because she was so absurdly happy. She could think of nothing but the touch of her lover's lips and his last words:

'I'll write to you to-night so that you'll get a note from me in the morning, and I'll come and see you in the afternoon. Sleep well to-night, sweetheart, and get well quickly—and remember how much you mean to me.'

'I *do* think your *fiancé* is a *most* good-looking and attractive young man,' Judy's nurse informed her. 'Aren't you a lucky girl?'

'So lucky that I can hardly believe my own good fortune,'

whispered Judy, and she put out a hand and touched a bi
mauve carnation which nodded close to her bedside.

'Are you getting married soon?' questioned the nurse, wh
liked a little bit of gossip.

Judy's heart beat very quickly, and she closed her eyes.

'As soon as I leave the home.'

'I suppose you've been engaged for some time?'

'I rather think I have,' said Judy in a low voice. 'Yes, I'v
been engaged to him for quite a long, long time.'

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